

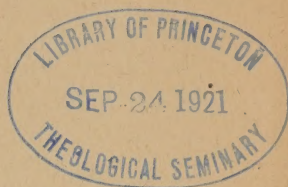
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SERMONS BY THE REV.
JOSEPH PARKER, D.D.

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PRAYER.

THOU doest as Thou wilt in the armies of heaven and amongst the children of men, and none may say unto Thee, What doest Thou? Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; not our will but Thine be done. Pardon our mistakes and our refusals, our impious rejections and non-compliances with the march of Thine own movement and with the purposes of Thine own will. We have sinned in ignorance, and we have sinned in intention, and Thou hast brought us to sore humiliation and utterest self-contempt. We have done the things we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things that we ought to have done. We have refused the Stone elect and precious, we have built upon sand of our own gathering; behold, our houses have fallen down from the roof to the basement, and they lie in ruins about our feet, for we have played the fool before God, and have not consulted the spirit of wisdom. We have trusted to ourselves, we have perished in self-confidence; we have not diligently and penitently inquired the way of the Lord that we might walk therein with steadfastness and ever-brightening hope: but Thou hast dashed us to pieces like a potter's vessel; Thou hast torn our nest to pieces, and scattered it upon the stormy wind; Thou hast barked our fig-tree, and taken away our one ewe lamb, and turned our vineyard into a wilderness. And herein is that saying true, God is a jealous God, full of burning zeal; He will have no rival, He will reign alone; for He is complete and sovereign, infinite in resource and in graciousness, and He will share His throne with none. Enable us to accept the throne of God, and to bow under His gracious sceptre, and to say in our bitterest desolation that the Lord doeth what seemeth good in His sight, and, behold, He will bring it all out in the light and glory of love. Come to the weary ones, and give them rest; come to broken hearts, and bring them the balm that is in Gilead; come to those who are ill at ease, and whisper the seasonable word in the ear of their distress.

We pray at the Cross, we look upon the red blood; it is the redeeming stream; we look upon the five wounds, the five entrances into Thy love and Thy kingdom—make them five seals of our adoption and sonship and infinite security. Amen.

XXXI.

THE REFUSED STONE.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, JUNE 8TH, 1899.

"The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner."—Ps cxviii. 22.



OW is this to be accounted for? You did all you could to hinder Him, and there He is at the head—the Saviour of the world, the throned Son of God. You spat upon Him, and scourged Him, and crucified Him; and yet there He stands, fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. You hated Him, but God loved Him; that is the reason of the exaltation and the immutable sovereignty. The Lord reigneth. The wrath of man He restrains; He keeps back the remainder of it that He may dash it in the face of His foes. Why will we not be wise? Why will we not kiss the Son whilst we are in the way with Him? Why do we set up our little impertinence and self-will, and say that we know what is right, and we will have this man and not that man?—whereas we have nothing to do with it. God reigns, God elects; whom He fore-knows He predestinates to be conformed to the image of His Son. We can do nothing against the truth but for the truth; we can swing with gravitation, or try to swing against it and have our brains dashed out.

"The stone which the builders refused." But surely the builders could not be wrong? They were experts. We pay for an expert in our age; for we have high prices to pay for the most elaborate ignorance. They knew exactly what stone to choose and what stone not to choose, and they reported upon the case, and upon their report the stone was cast away with a spitting of contempt upon it. Does God delight to baffle the malevolent ingenuity of man? Has He some special pride in taking the experts

by the feet and dipping them into the river as if He would drown them in the waters of contempt? It is an awful thing to be an expert when you do not know anything about the business in which you profess to be a proficient ; your aggravation is sevenfold. The common man would not feel it one tenth part so much as you do, because he is not an expert ; he gives opinions as it were offhandedly and superficially, but you are scribes and Pharisees and experts, and you only go into court for a fee of not less than fifty guineas, and would not shake your silk again over any brief under that sum which you call an honorarium. Surely the builders cannot be wrong, because they are experts. The stone which the builders refused has become the head of the corner. I am sorry for the builders, because they will every day have to pass by that stone and see their own condemnation written upon its election and coronation, and they will hasten past that stone whispering to one another, and trying that old familiar trick of changing the subject. Every day to have to face your folly ; every day to read the black story of your wickedness ! The builders cannot get to their city offices without passing the head stone of the corner, and remembering that they refused the Lord's election, and tried to cancel the predestination of the Eternal. You may wriggle as you please, and quibble with infinite subtlety of verbal dialectic, but when you have wasted all your breath in untoward polysyllables there remains the sullen, stubborn, unchangeable fact, that there is a sovereignty in the universe, a law that proceedeth and cannot be hindered ; a decree that is being worked out little by little, hour by hour, from the dawn to the zenith, from the zenith to the occidental line ; still the great march of the Divine purpose proceeds ; and none can hinder.

But the builder has a redress ; the builder has an uncomfortable and uncomfoting consolation ; he says he always knew that this stone had a meaning in it, and that even in his most wrathful moments he never denied that the stone was a good one, and might some day come to some kind of selection and win for itself some place in the total edifice of the Divine purpose. Away ! too many words ! Yet who would dash the cup from his lips ? Poor disappointed one ! it is all he has to

drink, and who would see even his enemy die of thirst? It is a sad thing when man takes upon himself the attributes of omniscience; it is a distressing and most agonising thing for any man to undertake to say what is going to be done to-morrow. One has pity even upon the poor ill-paid weather prophet whose vaticinations are printed on the front page of the daily journal: which vaticinations never come to pass; but if they come to pass within a week he finds a kind of warmth and comfort about the soul, because he wishes to persuade himself, though he knows what a liar he is, that that was the week he really meant when he said the other week! Do not be prophets, that is to say, predictionists, fortune-tellers, people who know what stones are going to be first, midst, last. The Lord reigneth; He will put the stones in their right places; He knows where the rough blocks should be, and where the diamond should be set, and what stone is fittest to meet the morning kiss of the sun. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Yet we cannot, I repeat, but be sorry for the builders, because having once been convicted of this most tragical and ludicrous mistake, they can never open their mouths upon any subject any more. Men would not allow them to be heard in the assembly; they would say, Ha, ha! these men refused the stone,—down! They would never be heard again in any assembly of honest men or of honest hearts; such men and such hearts would cry out upon them, and say, You have no claim to be heard, you refused the stone that was meant to be the head stone of the corner: how dare you speak to the intelligence or to the moral agony of the age? It is thus that God closes the mouth of the enemy without saying one word to the impostor. He simply keeps on rearing His building, carrying up His temple to the dome, and when it is done He leaves the men to their own reflections, and those reflections darken into the unutterable darkness and the worm that cannot die.

Many persons have undertaken to refuse the Bible stone. God has made it the head stone of the corner. Every day brings a new witness to the truth of the Bible, and even to the science of the Bible, and one day even Moses will have what is due to him in the

way of tribute and gratitude and coronation. Moses has stood many a test ; our hearts have ached for the grand old man as he had to die without treading the land that was fruitful with the harvest of a promise. Our grief was premature. Do not interfere with God's way. He knows it is better to die here than to die there ; let Him fix the place, and dig the grave, and write the epitaph ; and as for us, let us stand back ; we are of yesterday and know nothing. Moses was refused and cast out and utterly condemned, but to-day the hosts of the choir invisible lift up their voice in thunder-anthems ; the song they sing is the song of Moses and the Lamb. God will work, must work ; He began with a purpose, and to the last throb and pulse of its meaning He will work it out into music and beauty and completeness.

We read of men being self-made fools in this matter of refusals. It is always the builders who refuse ; that is to say, the leading men, the architects, the up-builders, the trained minds, the experts, the scribes and the Pharisees—men so learned in the law that it would be impossible for them to have the slightest conception of the spirit. "This Moses whom they refused, the same did God send." So we read in Acts vii. 35. They refused the elect stone, they would not have Moses teach them beyond the terms of their own blind self-confidence. They wanted Moses to become a popular preacher—and popular preacher means the man who says with emphasis what other people try to say—a mere echo, an empty echo, a shadow-voice, without individuality, without the majesty and the tragedy of the Cross in his soul. These men are popular because they reject the stone which God has elected. God nominates our leaders ; God appoints every man to his own place ; God inverts sequences and prophecies. We should have said Aaron and Moses, but God says Moses and Aaron. God did not care for the three years' seniority over the younger man ; He said, Stand back—Moses and Aaron. And old Jacob knew that there was a movement going on in his hands, magnetic, occult, incalculable, which made him crown and bless according to a law other than the law of primogeniture ; and if some said, Nay, my father, this one first, and

that one second, Jacob said, Let be, and groped his way in growing blindness to the working out of the Divine election. We are great at primogeniture. I wonder what we think it means. We are quite sure it ought to mean something, because it is so long; you can wind it almost around the body of a serpent, it lengthens itself out so wondrously. God has come down again and again in history, and said, No, not this, but that; not Esau, but Jacob; not Aaron, but Moses. The great voice has sounded through all the aisles and corridors of ever-rising history; the first shall be last and the last shall be first; and God thus shakes the nations and the buildings together and works out of the intermingling the final and perfect Man. Let alone! Thy will be done.

Ah, we have been wonderful in our arbitrary selections and elections. But God says, Accept the will, obey the discipline. And the apostle has said so in every grade of eloquence. "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven." This business of refusal is a business connected with austere and inevitable responsibility. You cannot both reject the stone and have it; you cannot build upon the stone whose virtue you deny. Do not imagine that the stone and the sand are the same thing; what is built upon the rock is a house; what is built upon the sand is also a house; the difference is in the foundation, and you cannot decorate a sand house into a rock foundation; it cannot be done. And do you suppose that God allows all our refusals to end in nothingness and makes no account of them, saying, Well, so let it be; these people have refused Him, but I will think nothing further about it? That is not the case as it is stated in Holy Scripture: "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded, but ye have set at naught all My counsel and would have none of My reproof"—what then? Is He but a good-natured Deity that will smile at the infirmities and account our refusals as accidental mischances? This is the answer: "I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when

your fear cometh as desolation and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, and distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me; for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of My counsel; they despised all My reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." Life creates its own judgment-day; we need no pedagogue to deck a throne in white and set it in the air that we may gaze at it; that judgment-throne is in the conscience, in every man's own heart. Every man knows whether he is true to the inward voice or false; let every man decide.

Refusals do not end in themselves. Do not suppose that the matter is of no consequence; that we can refuse, and nothing more will be heard of it. It is not so written in the Book. They refused to obey, and the consequence is that the Lord mocked them and shamed them. We have to face our refusals. We cannot throw our lives behind our backs, and say, Nothing more will be heard of this. Everything more will be heard of it; we shall give an account to God for every idle word we have spoken; we shall have to account for our decisions and elections and preferences. It is so sad to think that the greatest blunders in all human history have been committed by the leaders, the preachers, the clergy, the statesmen, the scribes, the Pharisees. It is heart-breaking to think that they will one day have to face their own stupidity and their own crimes. We say, Surely the scribe and the Pharisee cannot be wrong. If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can be so foolish as the wise man when his wisdom is not wisdom, when his light is not light; for there is an obstinacy of intelligence when it is only partial, and that obstinacy leads to the most disastrous results.

A writer has undertaken on his own suggestion, and happily at his own expense, to shatter the whole fabric of Christendom. What a man he must be! He has undertaken to show that the Bible and all the

fathers, pagan and classical, all the antiquarian lore on which we build so much, is all the work of the monks of the twelfth century! The monks of that fruitful century wrote Moses and the prophets and the evangelists and the apostles, and wrote all the great learned works in the Greek and Latin language, and therefore Christendom is built upon a species of smoke. Let him be heard! He sent his book to me, saying, Why do you public teachers of Christianity not answer this book? I answered it in a sentence; I am afraid that sentence, though but one, was too long; said I, Many thanks for your book; I am not an antiquarian scholar, and I have next to no acquaintance with the monks of any century, I am specially unfamiliar with the monks of the twelfth century; I cannot follow all your learned argument, but I can follow you in one sentence in your own preface; that sentence is as follows: "The Americans are just about, in 1896, let us say, to celebrate the fourth anniversary of the discovery of America." Said I, If this is a specimen of your accuracy and archæology, I need not read any more of your book. He came to see me and said, This is perfectly true what I have said, that the Americans are in the year 1895 or 1896 about to celebrate the fourth anniversary of the discovery of America. I said, What! you surely mean fourth centenary, the four hundredth year. Well, said he, with uplifted hands, I never saw it until this moment! A man who can give himself to a blunder of that sort of his own manufacture, I am not going to trust too far in matters which I cannot bring to an equally severe and definite test. I always find that if a man cannot speak his own language correctly, there is some just suspicion to be attached to his speaking all other languages or speaking any of them. If a man does not know his own country, I do not think he can know very much about the mountains and valleys of the moon. And so the Book still stands, and the assailant books are never asked for. The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner. Let us be just to fact.

There is a refusal which is right. That refusal is associated with the illustrious name just quoted.

Moses when he was come of age refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. The offer was made to him, he might have had the honour, he might have occupied an exalted position; he was learned in all the lore of the Egyptians, he had been proved to be a man of capacity, of great physical beauty and majesty, of great moral force and dignity; and when the offer was made to him that he might be the son of the king's daughter, he said, No. Then what will you choose? I choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God. These are the refusals that mark critical points in human history. These, too, are the refusals which bring character to completeness and to crowning majesty. Resist, refuse the devil, and he will flee from you. When he says, All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me, order him behind you as you would order a hound that had incurred your displeasure. Refuse the wrong king; send for the Jesus you have rejected, saying, We will have this Man to reign over us; and say to Him, God forgive us! come and reign over us, Son of Mary, Son of God.

Understand, therefore, finally, that we cannot depose those whom God has called in His electing love to this position or to that. We can say to Him, Lord, make me much, little, nothing, but let me know that it is Thy doing, and I shall be calm with Thine own peace; I shall not know the burning of jealousy and of envy; I will know that He who set the stars in their places has appointed my habitation. That is the spirit in which to accept the providence of life, and work out the destiny fixed by the love of God. Understand that we cannot all be at the head of the corner. Honour enough for us if we be in the God-built edifice, whether in the base, in the midst, or at the top. God must be allowed to build His own temples in His own way. "He that buildeth all things is God." Let us further remember that every man is a living temple of the Holy Ghost, and that of the temple of his heart Christ must be the chief corner stone. We must not build even our own heart-temple from specifications and plans of our own invention. God plans the insect, and God plans the seraph. The marvel of God's wisdom is

shown in the specialty of individual life. Man is many, yet man is one. No two men are identical. No two responsibilities can be so blended as to relieve any man of the entire burden of his own life. What is the head stone of our heart? Have we any idols to cast out? Jesus can have only one place; whatever we build, be it gold, silver, or precious stones, if it be not built on the one foundation it will be overwhelmed and broken down for ever.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, how wondrous are Thy ways in manifoldness and beauty and suggestion! how great is the altar at which we kneel! All things praise the Lord. In this great utterance of psalm and reading and thanksgiving may no human heart be dumb; show us that silence is blasphemy, teach us that to be dumb is to be hostile; may we know Thy wonderful mercy which accepts the music of the heart as if it were also the music of the voice. Thou hast given us all things richly to enjoy; may we testify our enjoyment by our psalm; may we not be degraded by our own ingratitude. Teach us that thankfulness multiplies the gifts which it acknowledges; in all things may we be thankful, and in all things may we rejoice. Can we rejoice in Thy chastening? Thou dost lacerate us, and, behold, our weakness gives way; Thou dost desolate us, and we cannot sing in the wilderness. Is the stroke of Thine hand a stroke of love? Enable us to receive it as such, lest our hearts wax rebellious and kick against the four corners of Thy throne. Show us that Thou dost test our strength as well as our weakness by Thy chastening; show us that when Thou dost chasten us Thou art as a seedsman coming to receive the harvest—a harvest of obedience and acquiescence and of resignation. But to these things we must grow in the centuries to come; we cannot do these things here and now under skies so grey and on a sand which can hold no foundation for our life-house; mayhap in the centuries to come even our poor voices may join the acclaim, and we, even we, may be in haste to kiss the hand that held the rod. But we cannot kiss it now; in a thousand years maybe we shall see it all. Thou dost hide a great doctrine and a comforting hope in our desolated hearts; Thou hast only asked of us faith, and Thou dost first give that which Thou dost require. Wondrous has been Thy way towards us; Thou hast made us exultant with joy and all but mad with despair; Thou hast sent adversity to tear down our house, and grief to spoil the feast of our heart. Yet Thou art watching it all and directing it all, and Thou wilt bring it all to sanctification and completeness. We thank Thee for all Thy love; we see it in the darkness; it is a star before the morning, it is a star that is not afraid of the night. Thou dost send to

us voices and visions and comfortings and evangels manifold, and adapted to our weakness and our forlorn misery. We bless Thee that Thou hast undertaken the great question of sin; the blood of Jesus Christ Thy Son cleanseth from all sin; behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. May we follow Thee and cling to Thee, and accept the offers of Thy love and fall in with all the overtures of Thine unspeakable mercy. Regard the stranger within our gates with favour; take away from his heart all sense of lonesomeness; may he feel that in Christ there is no more sea that all whom He loves are within the reach of His heart, and all of them can receive the breathing of His love, and He in return be enriched by all their honour and confidence and affection. Look upon all who have come from the market-place; purge their ears of the noise of the world, give them the joy of silence—that quick, eager, sensitive silence that hears the going of God in the clouds. If any man has brought special sin here, having stained the week with deepest iniquity, and has come from the house of evil, from the pit of degradation, and from the solitude of shame, we leave him with Thee, we have no prayer great enough to include such noisomeness; but we have heard from a thousand voices of history that Thy mercy endureth for ever. If any soul would be better, struggling out of beasthood into manhood, trying to recover lost ground, trying to escape the tempter, the Lord help such with a very tender mercy. Gather up all these little children as Thou wouldst gather flowers in Thine own garden, and kiss them and bless them and give them to feel that all the days will bring some joy of their own. Our old folks and sick ones, our friends who know the bitterness of grief, we lay them down at Thy feet; Thy look will be their heaven.

We pray all this at the Cross, already blossoming out of the winter of its desolation into the summer of its universal acceptance. Amen.

XXXII.

MANIFOLD GRACE.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 11TH, 1899.

"The manifold grace of God."—I PETER iv. 10.



THE whole verse reads thus, "Let every man that has received the gift even so minister the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." What is "manifold"? Many? No. The word "many" would be misleading, though it does enter into the larger and truer interpretation of the term. Manifold in this case means variegated, many in colour and light and bloom and beauty. Manifold is not in this relation a question of quantity or quality, but of variety; every colour a poem, all the colours belonging to one another and totalling up into one ineffable whiteness. Every man hath received the gift, therefore let him minister the same, and let one give to another, and let every man bring his colour to every other man's colour, and let all the world see how variegated in charm and hue is the total grace or gift of God. Every man holds his own colour of grace as a steward. Your colour is not mine, mine is not the colour held by some other man, but every man hath received his gift of God, his shade of colour. The shades of colour do not look well when they are taken away from one another; therefore they should be arranged into poems of brightness and bloom and fragrance; for God is the giver of them all. The holders of the variegated grace of God are only stewards.

Has there been any chaffering of contention in the green woods all these summer days? Not one word of such rivalry or foolish ambition or vanity has been heard. How many greens are there? Let those who have leisure count the number,

And may one green live with another? One green may be essential to the interpretation of another, to its full showing-off. But shall the blue green fight with the grey green? They know better; nature more loyally serves her Lord. All the green forests sway in the music of unity: it is only man who makes a fool of himself. His colour he is always magnifying above every other colour; he says his is the right green, and other people's green is the wrong green. So we have botanised ourselves into little woods and special corners of plantations, and we publish annual reports to show that our green is the right green. Oh! that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would consider the manifold grace of God, the many-sidedness of His gifts, the many colours in His gardens and in His forests, and that they would not compare one to the disadvantage of the other. But man must to the last be a fool. We cannot get people to praise one blue without pouring contempt upon another. You never heard any preacher praised except when you have been told that he is nothing like so beautiful a green as you may find in some other preacher. They will not take a man or a colour or a plant or flower or tree for what it is. Who will pluck the apples of the apple-tree when he knows perfectly well that it is not a pear-tree? He lives for pear-trees only, to the exclusion of apples and plums and other fruits. This is what man is always doing, and he is always doing so to his own vexation and impoverishment. He says, Whilst acknowledging the merit—bless his dear little soul, if it is not too small to be blessed; he acknowledges the merit!—then let the universe take holiday and do what it pleases for one round of the clock. One man is not every man; one variety of grace is not the total grace of God; one minister is not the ministry; one book is not literature. A book on the geography of Asia Minor is not to be contrasted with Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Why will not people distinguish, and allocate, and recognise the distribution of the Divine gifts by Divine hands, and let the Lord alone? Who refuses bread because it is not water? who refuses wheat because it was not grown in a vineyard? Recognise the manifold grace of God, the many coloured flowers, the variegated

foliage. The variety is an illustration as well as a proof of the deity.

This word "manifold" occurs in many places, and it applies to good things and to bad things alike. There is nothing in the descriptive word itself, it is only when it is related to some substantive that it acquires a character or indicates a special utility of its own. Who expected to find this expression in Nehemiah, the busiest of the books, the wall-building book, the Balbus before the time. "In Thy manifold mercies thou forsookedst them not" (Neh. ix. 19). The mercy is one, the mercies are ten thousand. Always distinguish between the substantial central quality and its raditations or offshoots or incidental distributions of forces. Mercy comes in many forms. They say—oh that we had ears to hear!—that chastening may be mercy. In the manifoldness of Thy mercies Thou didst not forsake Thy people. One had a small mercy; one had a glint of light; another had a little flower from Thy garden; another had a great vision of light, a kind of morning at midnight; one had a dream, another a psalm, another a deep consciousness that things were going right when they seemed to be going wrong; and they bore their testimony and contributed their various experience until the whole totalled up into mercy. It required all the mercies to represent the mercy. That is how God uses the singular in all the grammar of His providence, and that is the purpose He has in view in gathering up all the plurals. He has from the beginning been aiming at a great unity; He has had to break Himself up into many visions and many divers indications, and He has had to proceed by a ministry of variegation, but all the time His object has been to build up a great unity. It is so in that grand final anthem that has to be sung the universe through; there shall one day go up a grand thunder hallelujah, sung as hallelujah has never been sung by lips on earth—"Hallelujah! the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth; the kingdoms (the plural) of the world have become the kingdom (the singular) of our God." Think of the mighty force that is handling kingdoms, uniting and relating empires! These are nothing to Him, for He unites and relates the con-

stellations, and gathers the heavens into heaven. In the meantime we are in the land of plurals and in the land of manifoldness of representation and service, and what we have to recognise is that all these plurals are making their way as fast as time will open its gates into the grand singular, the infinite solidarity.

In that most wondrous of the psalms in many respects, the 104th, we read in the twenty-fourth verse, "O Lord, how manifold are Thy mercies!" Why not say, How great is Thy mercy! That should be said, that has been said, but most of us are still in the lower school, and we have not quite got into the way of amalgamating and unifying the divers plurals and bringing them into one sublime and glowing unity. The apostle Paul, most wondrous of writers and speakers, in one unconscious effort united the plurals and the singular in one grand expression, Ephesians iii. 10—that album of wisdom, that temple of the uppermost and innermost piety. Paul there speaks of "the manifold wisdom of God." It is another variety of the text, "the manifold grace of God"—the grace split up into attributes, into lines, separate individuality accentuated, and yet all gathering themselves up into grace, wisdom, love. Men will not learn this lesson; they expect to find all the colours in one flower, they cannot really believe that God made two flowers; they can appreciate one flower only, and although before their very eyes there are spread out many flowers, yet they have their pet flowers as they have their pet graces, their pet texts, their miserable and bewildering and misleading partialities. But how many minds can take in two ideas? how many minds are open to the reception of new ideas, thoughts, dreams, and visions? Not many. What a group of tender and ennobling thoughts!—manifold mercy, manifold wisdom, manifold grace. Recognise the manifoldness. Could you imagine any man saying that a piano is not a musical instrument because it is not a flute? There may be some such peculiarly wise man, but we have not met him, and therefore we shall dismiss the notion almost with contempt. Do you discard your little child because she has not the features which Phidias would have loved to sculpture?

or the little boy because he is not the kind of creature that Raphael would have stolen from the streets in order to reincarnate him in paint? You recognise the excellence of the child, and that is right; and you should recognise the degree of grace which you can receive, and not dispute that another man has not the right grace because he has seen a different view of God from that which your own eyes have seen. Every man, every soul must get its own view of God. This is the rule through all life. Get out of the landscape what you can. We are all, if wise and reverent, artists and poets according to our own gift. Hear what you can in the air; see what you can see in all the outspreading wonders of God, and be thankful if you get any glance or peep of light and beauty; call that beauty your own, be faithful to it, and you will get more.

I must recall an idea just referred to, namely, that the word manifold is applied not only to things good, divine, beautiful, but to other things. "I know your manifold transgressions and sins" (Amos v. 12). Every man sins in his own way, and every man condemns the sins of every other man. That is how we come to have the little clay idol called Personal Respectability — that miserable imp, that worst species of infidelity, if exaggerated and unduly applied and construed. Every man tries to make himself respectable by remarking upon the want of respectability in the man who is sitting next him: as who should say, You observe how critical I am, and how different I am from this person, although we are seated near to one another and are actually in the closest bodily proximity; yet how different I am from him! But the other man is saying exactly the same thing! That is the awkward part of the criticism. Mind yourself, take heed unto thyself. Pulling down another man's house does not make your own any the more secure. Sin is manifold; some men sin in grey hues, others in ardent reds and glaring greens; and others sin with a peculiar intermingling of all the hues, so that it is difficult to fix a name and fasten it on the particular quality and range of sin. O man, pierce thine own heart! Judge not that ye be not judged; for with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged, and with

what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again. Consider not the mote that is in thy brother's eye; get the beam out of thine own. But that would put an end to conversation, and turn the school of human training into a school of the deaf and dumb.

The same word is applied by the very apostle of the text. In the same epistle (i. 6): "Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." What is a temptation to one man is not a temptation to another. You rise in perfect decorum from the table; another man at the same table lost his manhood and went body and soul to the devil. Temptations come in various forms and in various forces. It is no temptation to you to do a certain thing, but it is an overpowering temptation to another person to do it. Consider thyself lest thou also be tempted. If thy brother has gone astray, say nothing about it, but as soon as possible go out into the darkness and find him, even if you have to grope for him and sit down beside him and kiss him back into manhood and hope and sonship.

So then the word "manifold" may be applied not only to the grace of God, the wisdom of God, and the mercy of God, but to the transgressions and the sins of men and to the temptations through which all souls that are being educated for heaven must needs pass. Be ye stewards of the grace which God has committed to you. It is a grace of wealth, a grace of leisure or of patience or of tenderness; you are gifted with the love of mankind, you have yearning hearts after the Lord; you have a great skill in seeing the best side of every man's character, and working upon the lost from the point of hope and the centre of possible restoration. Oh, do not look at the weed, look at the flower; do not look at the hardships, but look at the enjoyments. Wondrous is the mercy, the grace of God. I see it in every beast and bird, in every dewdrop and in every flower; I see nothing but God in all the beauties of nature and in all the education and higher harmonies of life. I would never speak of theology and science; to me there is nothing but theology, that is to say, God. Science is religious, science has a pew in every church, science belongs to

the altar. God has not amputated His own universe, and scattered it in little offcuttings and branches and schisms of spiritual and secular, theology and science, and sacred and something else contrastive. No, all things belong to the manifold grace of God. Do not permit a man to be a thief in the house of the Lord ; everything that is precious belongs to the house. Arithmetic is part of the hymn-book, and science in its abstrusest inquiries must needs return to the altar to recruit its strength or to relight the lamp of its hope. This is my belief. I see the grace of God in every season of the year, in spring and summer, in autumn and winter alike, and I see the mercy of God in all the moan and sorrow and in all the hope and joy of providential life. I see the throne of God in the midst of things ; I feel the breath of God in the wilderness and in the tropical paradises of flowers and things blooming and fragrant.

But if I would see the grace of God in its broadest manifestation, in its morning and noontide glory, I would look at the Cross. That is the grace of God which bringeth salvation ; that is the grace that sought us whilst we were wandering and brought us home in faith and penitence, in tears and love. The Cross of Christ should be interpreted from this point of view, namely, as the great appeal of the heart of God, the outgoing of the infinite pity of heaven to seek men, to save them, to bring them to God. Never be ashamed of the word grace. It is a charming sound, it has in it a deep philosophy ; it means the heart of God, so to say, supreme above the hand of God, mercy greater than omnipotence. By grace are ye saved, and when the apostle would gather us all together in his great arms and make us most conscious of the Divine blessing, he says, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." When he would stir us to the noblest endeavour, he says, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." Let that be your inspiration, your sustenance.

The word "grace" is not popular to-day. It is by no means a modern word, for it goes back to the very heart of God. This is the day of materialism ; of pomp and show and glittering spectacle ; this is an

age of mechanics, engineering, and what is called practical work. I claim for "grace" that it is the most practical work of all. It renews the heart, it purifies the motive, it gives life a new purpose, it makes conduct beautiful, and any ministry that can accomplish all these marvels is never to be described or despised as sentimental or theoretical. Brethren, until the grace of God has had free course in our lives and hearts we know not the highest meaning of our own manhood, nor can we get any clear view of our own eternal destiny. The grace of God is what we need—the purifying spirit, the clear vision, the high aim. God waits to be gracious.

PRAYER.

ALmighty GOD, teach us by Thy Spirit that we know not what we do either in good or evil ; teach us that we cannot calculate the value of our own actions or the range of our own influence. Teach the wicked man his folly when he says that he injures no one but himself ; comfort the good man when he thinks that he is not doing anything to help forward the progress of Thy kingdom. Show us that influence attaches to all thought and all action ; that we influence ourselves, that we sculpture our own faces and mould our own figures, and introduce music or discord into our own voices, and that we may make the air a living way up to heaven by constant, loving, trustful prayer. Show us that all things are in motion if we could but understand Thy method in things, and teach us that we see best with our eyes shut, with our bodies sent away from us, that the spirit may have larger franchise, ampler liberty, fuller delight. We thank Thee for religious aspiration, for the hungering and thirsting after better things, and we bless Thee that there is no aspiration of the soul after light and truth and beauty and music that does not rest upon the promise of the Infinite Righteousness and the unspeakable mercy. Teach us how solemn a thing it is to live ; bring to bear upon us all considerations that can lift us out of the lower depths and from the lower levels, and carry us away into the great mountains, whence we may see the larger sanctuaries and the opening gates in the great light. The Lord pity us when we are low-minded and mean of soul, and when we make small calculations and arrangements ; say unto us from Thine own heights, Arise, shine, for thy light has come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. Thus may we awaken to behold the morning, and to improve every shining moment of the dawn. We have brought our sin to Thee that we may leave it at the Cross, that we may heartily repent of the same and abandon it for ever, saying, each for himself, God be merciful unto me a sinner ! Turn all our thoughts, we humbly pray thee, Christward and towards the Cross, that we may know somewhat of Thy deeper meanings and come into closer audience with the King, so that the whispers of our heart may reach Him and the unspoken desires of our souls may affect Him like living prayers. Amen.

XXXIII.

ONE OF THE LEAST.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, JUNE 15TH, 1899.

"One of the least of these."—MATT. xxv. 40.



CHRIST never despised little folks, little things, little occasions, little duties; Jesus never turned away from the small and the lame, the halt and the blind. Why was this? It was because He was Jesus. No man a mere man could have afforded to attend to us little creatures, persons of no consequence; it required God to stoop low enough to come down to us. The Deity is in the stoop, not in the grammar. He who holds a grammatical God has no God to hold. The Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ is in His pity, care, tears, mercy, His coming out after us in the dark times, in the stormy nights, sure that if we are to be found at all we must be found in the wilderness. That is His Deity; not some variable preposition or difficult word to construe with some other verbal difficulty.

"One of the least of these." This was His doctrine about the Church. If I might tell you why I chose a particular section or aspect of the Church I should have no hesitation in approaching your confidence, though I might instigate your criticism. Jesus Christ said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I." I consider that where these circumstances concur I find the Church, the Christian Church, the redeemed and sanctified Church. I may be wrong; older and better men infinitely than I am may form some other opinion about the Church, and they are as much entitled to their construction of the terms as I am; let there be no angry difference

between us or amongst us. This is my definition of the Church: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." He did not choose a great thousand or fix His unit at ten thousand; as usual, He stoops, He condescends, and accepts the very lowest plural. "Where two or three"—just the very smallest number of persons—"are gathered together"—because they love Me, because they trust to Me, and depend upon My Cross for their salvation—wheresoever I find even that little number I find My own Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Thus I am saved from many intricate questions which can do me no real good of heart or soul, but which might very greatly perplex and distress me. I retire into the sanctuary built by the hands of Christ Himself, and that little sanctuary is only as big as two or three, in the right name and with the living Christ amongst them—that is the Church. But man will not have it; man hath found out many inventions; he is in danger of cutting himself to pieces with the sharpness of his own misled genius. If this definition of the Church is right, and it seems to me to be absolutely and unquestionably right, then I get rid of a great number of words which men are very fond of using. I hear of "weak" churches. Where did Christ speak of them? He never alluded to them. I hear of "poor" churches. Where are they? Christ never mentioned one of them. Poor churches are a simple impossibility; the one word contradicts the other. I hear of isolated churches. Man is so fond of adjectives—"poor" and "weak" and "isolated." Does that word "isolated" ever occur in my Lord's speech? I have read Him now for a lifetime; I hardly read any other teacher; I do not remember a single case in which my Lord used the word isolated in reference to two or three broken hearts gathered together in His name and healed by His grace. But man could not live without epithets; it would be poor living if we could not coin as many adjectives as we want, and therefore we have now called into existence poor churches, weak churches, isolated churches, struggling churches; and my Lord never heard of one of them. Be very careful how you apply epithets to anything Christ ever did; it is im-

possible to fit an adjective to His substantive. So I am willing to be number two or number three in the little society which Jesus Christ condescends to recognise. Money is not essential to the constitution of a church; numbers have nothing to do with Christ's conception of His redeemed Church; isolated is simply an impossible word as applied to the two or three who can only meet behind a spring hedge or gather together by some well-side and drink His blood in water. It is not essential to the Church that there should be a minister. There we come upon a whole black seam of sophisms. People no sooner get together than they want a harmonium. I do not remember that my Lord ever spoke about a harmonium as essential to the constitution of His Church. It is no more necessary to the Church to have a minister than it is to a home to have a piano. But the people will have it so; they beg for harmoniums. When will we get back to the dear Lord's conception of the Church,—a witnessing body, a body dependent upon Himself and the Holy Ghost for the doctrine and the inspiration and the beneficence and the whole outset and outline of Christian life? Yet if I were to talk so even my own brethren would cast me out. But sometimes I prefer to be cast out; I love the open air, I love the sky; in its bright dumbness it often makes me religious.

And Jesus Christ, looking upon lives and services, said, "One of the least of these." Supposing them to be all little, there are some that are less and some that are least; and some man expressed some other man's feeling in the hymn which has in it this line, "Oh to be nothing, nothing!" The least is essential to the whole; every stone in the building is essential to the entire masonry; not a brick in the minster can be dispensed with. But do not let the least think that he is the biggest; do not let the least show his piety in his touchiness. There are some persons less than the least in their own speech, but they do not recognise this when they are spoken of as such in the speech of others. This is a subtle distinction; the sword of the Lord is sharp, piercing, to the dividing asunder of the joints and the marrow, and it makes havoc in all our flimsy distinctions and in all our pious hypocrisies.

When the Lord looks upon the services which people render, He often stops beside a cup of cold water, lifts it up, and smiles it into wine that makes glad the heart of God and man. That was all that the giver could give; being all that the giver could give, it became valuable, precious, priceless. "One of the least of these gifts." This woman hath cast in more than they all. Lord, how much has this woman given? ten thousand talents of silver or gold? we would see the glittery heap. Nay, said Jesus, more than that. This poor woman has cast in more than that, dost Thou say, sweet Lord? Ay. How much? All. The millionaire cannot give; no man gives except under the knife. Jesus Christ will not have it that any man can give Him anything except from the Cross, His own Cross, and the man's cross cut out of it; that is giving; the last bronze from the till—that is giving.

This alters our whole conception of Jesus Christ's thought, as we have misunderstood it. We thought He would be very careful about legions of stars, and He seems to be more careful of the poor man's one tallow candle that is set in the window on wintry nights to show the prodigal the way home. He will not allow that candle to sway in the storm; He guards it and keeps it steadily towards the window if mayhap the strayed girl or the prodigal boy may want to come home some night cold, and that candle is there, an evangel, a gospel, a luminous welcome. We have wholly misconstrued the idea of power. If we were required to describe power we should think of great magnitudes, immense distances; and God does not think of these things. He is great in pity, great in love, great in tears; never so much God to a fallen world as when saturated, drenched, drowned in the tears of pity. Poor man! Looking at a gigantic mass of mud called a mountain, he says, How noble, how vast, how grand! Why was this waste of epithets? They might have been sold for a bronze or two and given to the poor. Say my Lord is great when He cries over Jerusalem, saying unto the queen city of the world, Thine house is left unto thee desolate. Great pity is much more than great strength. God does nothing by mere energy, He makes no display of mere power; He never worked a miracle for the sake

of the miracle, He always worked it for the sake of the blind man or the lame creature or the suffering woman or the hungry ones that were feeling the pinch of starvation in the inhospitable wilderness. I will think of my Lord's greatness in this way; it brings Him nearer to me; perhaps He may weep over me some day and take me back into the heart which by my many sins I have forsaken or even distrusted. My hope is in the tears of God.

All through the Bible there is a wonderful care of little things; God noticing them, God caring for them, and God bringing them to perfectness of meaning. Said Jesus Christ on one occasion the most remarkable thing out of the beatitudes, and it is the beatitude that crowns the rest, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." That is greatness. "He putteth my tears in His bottle"; that is condescension. "None of his steps shall slide," as if he numbered step by step all the going of His people. One of those people said, "Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, my going out and my coming in." And another said, "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me, as if I were an only child." These are God's condescensions: sweeping the house diligently until He find the piece that was lost; leaving the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and going out after that which had strayed, and not returning until He had found it. This Shepherd undertakes no vain errands; He brings back the wanderer and completes the flock.

One of His disciples—he is quite a study in psychology, because he seems to be able to plunge into fire and to go through seas of darkness; and yet though he wrote very little he wrote some of the sweetest words that ever were written by mortal pen, and one of these words runs like this: "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from failing." In the Authorised Version it is "able to keep you from falling," but the finer distinction of the term is, Able to keep you from reeling, staggering, falling; able to save you before you fall into the ground, able to seize you in the very act of falling, and set you up again men. Once Jesus Christ said these words, showing how great He is in tenderness and in human mercy, Give

these people something to eat "lest they faint by the way." This is the Divine economist; He does not wait until people are half-dead of starvation, and then give them something; He anticipates hunger, so that when hunger comes it finds the table ready; not "because they are hungry," but lest they become hungry, lest they faint by the way. Oh the care! mother never spake a gentler word; fondest sister never took such pains to prevent or anticipate recurring hunger. There you have the deity of Christ; there you have the humanity of the Saviour. No man can define deity. If he could define deity he could define God, for Deity is but another name for God. But who can define that word which has become so large and glorious that it fills the imagination, exhausting all speech, and beginning the creation of a language of its own? So we say "God" without being able to define it. We must not think that we can take every mystery to pieces and put it together again as a puzzle. We cannot touch the sun, but we can receive its morning light and its mid-day crown. So it is with language; no man can define God, and yet it is so wrought into our Western thought and the very tissue, so to say, of our souls that no other word can take its place, it stands alone; as well attempt to displace the firmament by some canvas canopy as to displace this word God by any number of man-invented polysyllables. We misconceive greatness.

It is curious to know how the Church talks. Some time if you have half an hour to spare, which you ought never to have, it would interest you to hear how the poor old Christian Church all over the world talks. I could give you a short extract from the speech of this withered beauty, the speech of her who ought to have eclipsed the stars by her glowing splendour. She is talked about now in this way: It is a very, very poor affair; I was there some little time ago, and I think I am not exaggerating when I say that there really could not have been more than about five-and-twenty of a congregation. Ah! how they cut the

Lord's heart to pieces with sharp knives. They say, It was a very insignificant affair; there were no people of any importance there. Ah! thou slighted Calvary, thou often crucified Christ! Here is a definition of importance for thee! The Church is in the little village, and there are no persons of importance in it. What is importance? For all these people Christ died. But there are people of no importance! Sometimes the Church, as discredited and discrowned, is made to talk a language bordering on blasphemy, for she says, The resolution was carried by a very great majority; in fact, the minority was so small as to be of no account. My Lord said, Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst. Let us get back to the New Testament, back to Christ; let us redefine our position. I will have nothing to do with your millionaire demonstrations; I would go out after that which was lost, and by my Lord's strength I would continue out until I have found it. I would recognise the smallest worker, the Sunday-school teacher, the ragged-school teacher, the city missionary. What have I heard the Church, as dismantled and discrowned, say? She said that there was only a missionary preaching last Sunday. Only a missionary! —a man who has hazarded his life for the Lord Jesus; a man who has left his children on this shore that he may go to yonder land and tell the story of the Cross, its shame and glory. But when he comes to our pulpit we go to hear some popular preacher who never lost a night's sleep for the salvation of the world; and when asked why we have gone to hear him we say, Because there was only a missionary in our own church. Shame! That church can never win the world. It is a clumsily organised hypocrisy.

Then we must not make any mistake about this littleness. If we do little when we could do much, then the little goes for nothing. That is where your sixpence went! It was absolutely lost in ungrateful oblivion. Perhaps it was not wholly your blame, because you had the two coins in the same pocket, the half-sovereign and the half-shilling,

and it was just by an accident that you took out the white one. It may be so—may it, may it be so? If the little is all I can do, my Lord takes a few grassblades as if I had brought Him a whole paradise. But if I could have brought Him rich flowers, and only plucked a weed out of the hedgerow, He will not take my gift. He who can stoop low will not stoop to be insulted when I offer Him a hedgerow weed when I might have given Him a garden of orchids.

I have said that it is not essential to the constitution of the Church that there should be a minister. This goes to the root of a very important matter. It is no more essential to the constitution of a Church that it should have a minister than that it should have a steeple. It is because Christians so largely differ, I may say so vitally differ, about the constitution of the Church that they spend so much of their time in bitter and futile controversy. What is the Church of Christ, as Christ Himself understood it? is the all-comprehensive and all-determining inquiry. Not what fathers and founders, prelates and popes, have thought the Church of Christ to be, but what Christ Himself intended the Church to be is the question which should never be shirked. According to one definition, the Church is merely an expression of national life, and is just what the national life is. The national sentiment determines the constitution of the Church. If the nation were atheistic, there would be no Church; if the nation were evangelically disposed, there would be an evangelical Church; when the nation is worldly or religiously indifferent, the Church follows the mood of the world and sleeps in irresponsible languor. There is another conception of the Church which diametrically differs from this. According to the second definition, the Church of Christ is the body of Christ—a body composed of regenerated or converted souls which by solemn oath and covenant have united themselves as living members of a living Church. The characteristic note of this Church is sympathy with Christ, love of Christ, work for Christ, brotherhood in Christ. It will be seen that these two conceptions cannot co-exist. For my own part,

as your voluntarily elected pastor and teacher, I frankly say that I have adopted the second definition. Repentance, confession, forgiveness, regeneration, are essential to membership in the true Church of the Saviour. Distinctions and grades there will always be ; some will be " of note among the apostles," some will " seem to be pillars," others will be nameless and socially of no consequence whatever, yet out of all these varying materials there will be built up a holy house unto the Lord ; a sacred, tender, beneficent fellowship. To be one of the least in that fellowship is the greatest honour which any man can attain ; it never means rivalry, jealousy, or unholy emulation ; it means that the soul is content to be in Christ, whether as a little twig or a great branch ; its joy is in being attached to the root which is itself attached to the very heart of the universe.

PRAYER.

GOD in the person of His Son has all His mightiest works outdone. We see not God, but we see Jesus. His name is Immanuel; He took on our flesh, He spoke to our hearts, His words are with us to-day. We live upon those words as upon bread and water from heaven's fountains; we want no other food, we would live upon the Son of God. As the branch abideth in the vine, so would we abide in Christ; without Him we can do nothing; we can do all things through Christ enabling us. We have come to the house of prayer that we might for a moment turn it into a house of praise; for the Lord hath done great things for us, and we will not be silent concerning them. Thou hast taken us by difficult roads, up high mountains, and down deep valleys which never caught the sunlight; Thou hast been with us in the burning wilderness, and for us Thou didst find honey in the bare rocks. How then shall we be silent in Thine house, and take no part in the song which is sung by the rest of Thy creation? Thou hast beset us behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon us; Thou hast gone before us and prepared the way; Thou hast said unto crooked paths, Be straight, and Thou hast commanded rough places to be plain, and the valleys Thou hast exalted, so that the morning light might shine upon them. We remember that we have done the things we ought not to have done, but wilt Thou permit us to lay our hand upon Thine and to lead Thee to Calvary and to ask Thee whether Thy grace has not infinitely abounded above our sin. O Christ of God! behold Thine own Cross; recount Thine own wounds; feel again the deep spear-thrust, and tell us whether all this atoning, redeeming work is not infinitely greater than the sin of our short day. God be merciful unto me a sinner! is the cry of every broken heart. Thou hast ordained that prayer; Thou wilt never refuse the answer of love to so sharp a cry; Thou wilt say to each of us, Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee; and thus we will see in the Cross of Christ the way to pardon, thence to purity, thence to heaven. We pray for one another; it is well for the life that is bathed in prayer; no evil shall come nigh it, the pestilent night shall leave it untouched, and the darkening day shall leave it without a bruise. Happy are they who live in the sanctuary of Thine heart, Thou God of

Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, Thou God of the redeeming Cross. Break up all our own little notions and poor devices for reforming and redeeming the world : show us that from eternity Thou hast planned to do this, and that nothing can hinder the final consummation of the purposes of Thy grace ; we can do nothing against the truth but for the truth. Teach us how foolish we are if we depend upon ourselves to make God's world greener or give a deeper blue to God's own summer sky. Yet Thou hast been pleased to call us to co-operation, Thou hast made us part of Thine own husbandry, we are called fellow-workers with God ; herein we find our inspiration and our courage and our pledge of final success ; the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. So everything opposing Thy word must disappear, must be dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel, and as a stone shall all hindering furrows be dropped into the midst of the sea. Give courage, we humbly pray Thee, to all evangelists, missionaries, preachers of the everlasting Gospel and teachers of the holy doctrine, and may we, at home, abroad, in the school, in the wilderness, never change the subject. The enemy tempts us, he shows us how much fruit we might pluck off this tree and that tree and some other poor shrub ; may we keep to the tree which Thou hast set for our eating ; may we never change the theme ! Blessed shall be that servant who at the last shall be preaching none other than the infinite Christ, the all-kindling light of all the firmament, the peace and the glory of God. Wilt Thou be pleased to bless us all. Leave none unblest. Remember the old man whose prayers are nearly ended ; he is already beginning to put on his singing robes. And wilt Thou lovingly smile like a broad June morning upon all the little ones, and give them to feel that this life has no end, that it is already heaven, and that heaven has nothing more to do than to continue and to crown the present ; then when the trial comes and the cloud and the stress, the broken vow and the shattered staff, and the old, old misery that sweeps down upon us all, it will be time enough to speak a language they can understand, of consolation and sympathy and hope beyond the death line. Wilt Thou look graciously upon the strangers that are within our gates, friendly folks that have come to mingle their hymns and prayers with ours ; grant unto them a home blessing, destroy the nausea of home-sickness, give them to feel that in God's house there is a sense of home and fellowship and rest. God save the Queen ! the Queen Victoria, whose coronation day we have been thinking of, whose accession we have been celebrating. Her eighty years are too few—make them eight hundred, and more. God save the Queen ! Let the Queen live for ever ! and she will do us good and not evil,

though she tarry with us through many centuries. And if others are praying for their kings, rulers, presidents, and magistrates, the Lord hear the prayer of patriotism, and answer it with a great answer.

"We speak all this at the Cross, in the name of the red blood, in the power of the atoning sacrifice. Already we feel the balmy answer bringing its blessing. We wait a moment that we may catch it all. Amen.

XXXIV.

HOLDEN EYES.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 25TH, 1899.

"Their eyes were holden."—LUKE xxiv. 16.



ESUS CHRIST was walking with the two men. They knew Him perfectly well under ordinary conditions; it suited His purpose that they should not know Him for a little while, and therefore He held their eyes, so that they could not know Him. He did the same afterwards with Mary; He so held her eyes or transfigured Himself that Mary did not know the Lord she loved above all other lives. We are accustomed in the Bible to come upon such expression as "their eyes were opened"; now and again we come upon the corresponding remark, "their eyes were holden." The things were all there, the environment had not been changed one shade or whit; the change had taken place in the power of vision. Their eyes were not permitted to see, though they were wide open and though no oculist could see the slightest change in their formation. The same thing is happening to-day in both senses. Sometimes we say in our poor, mean language—for we drop into ineloquence when we are left alone very much—sometimes we say, That opened my eyes! I never saw it before; I cannot tell you exactly how it was, but from that

moment my eyes were opened, and I saw it all. Poor man! he has now and then what he vulgarly calls an eye-opener. Yet a wonderful creature is this little man. He invents great machines which sometimes blow him up into the air fifty feet high, and he does many curious things for which he gets large pay; he makes a livelihood by his ingenuity. Yet every now and then he confesses that he must have been undergoing a process of partial or total blindness; for he says quite suddenly, 'That opened my eyes! What opened your eyes?—an attitude, a sentence, a change of policy, a mere turning-round of the human figure that it might signal to some other figure? Yes, that is about what it was. And you tell me that so simple a thing opened your eyes? where were your eyes all the ten or twenty or fifty years before? The eyes were there, but they did not see. Perhaps they were holden; for the air is full of life, and that life takes our life into its keeping, and does just what it pleases with our ears and eyes and general sense of things, whilst all the time we are undergoing an expensive process of what is termed education.

We may profitably consider what it is to have our eyes holden, what a blessing it is, what a source of strength it is not to see things, not to know things, not to hear things, not to have any senses at all. There is a blessing on the negative side of the hedge; there is much profitableness in the impenetrable gloom. Not to see may be a privilege; not to know may be a science.

How true it is that our eyes are holden so that we may not see the perils of life by which we are constantly surrounded! We walk in danger; the air is full of arrows and sharp darts and poisoned elements. Some things we could not enjoy if there were not an element of poison in them. The honey would soon be no honey, the man of science tells us, if there was not inserted by the sting of the bee just one little drop of poison. There is honey that has no keeping in it because it has no poison in it; so the man of science tells us. On the whole, it is better for us not to be analytical chemists; it ministers much to the comfort of the house not to know the chemical constituents of

what we are eating and drinking. There are few things more troublesome than to be on intimate terms with an analytical chemist who lives next door to you. The air is full of danger; every step you take is a step along the edge of your grave. All the darkness has uncounted imps in it; the east wind brings them from no man knows where in countless millions. The awful microscope tells us that there may be more bacilli or some other hideous and distressing creature in one little point of butter than there are inhabitants in the total area of Europe. That had better not be widely known; there are nervous temperaments. Most Christians are timid people, or invalids, or incapable of hearing a preacher who says the word condemn in one syllable. My own twelve peers called the jury will not compensate me for my accident according to the value which I place upon my own life, because the learned judge has just told them (it was a work of supererogation certainly) that to go out of the house at all is to go into possible accident; he has told them in some learned apothegm that to breathe is to incur peril, and that therefore a man's accident is not to be estimated by itself as if it stood alone, as if that accident had not happened no other accident could have happened. What has happened is only one of a thousand possible accidents; and all that has to be taken into account when they assess the damages. It is well that we do not see these things. We do not know how near our death we were this morning; by a hair's-breadth we escaped a so-called accident that would have dashed us into eternity. Our eyes were holden. It is well we did not know.

Our eyes are holden that we may not see our own spiritual surroundings. It is a mercy that we cannot see God. Yet we rave about it as if He had inflicted an injury upon us because He will not show His face. We thus reject our greatest blessing. It is a mercy for us also that we cannot see our spiritual enemy the devil. If we could see him who could live? He is hidden from our eyes, or our eyes are holden that we should not see him; enough to feel the fiery breath of his temptation! enough to know that someone touched us as with a finger of flame and scorched our very blood! What are these tormenting passions, these

hellish desires, these sudden temptations to do evil? What is it that brings the curse to our lips or the deeper curse unspoken to our hearts? There is a ministry of evil in the universe. The Bible does not conceal that fact; the Bible reveals it and magnifies it and puts us on our guard against it; but mercifully our eyes are holden that we should not see the evil power that would devour our very soul.

A great mercy it is also that we cannot see death—grim, gruesome, horrible death. Yet he is always looking at us; he seems to be saying in that interrogatory look, Whom shall I strike next? There is a fair bud growing on the tree of the mother's heart, I have a mind to snatch it; there is a fair lily that gives value to all the rest of the garden, without that lily the other flowers would droop and wither, I have a mind to break the owner's heart; why not strike at the root of that lily or put a worm there that shall little by little gnaw the root or suck the blood-juice? That image is in your garden, in your house, in mine, on the thoroughfares, everywhere. And yet we go laughing on, joke on joke, and the merriment heightens like foaming wine. Verily it is a mercy that our eyes are holden that we should not see these things!

And a great blessing it is that we do not see the future. We cannot see to-morrow. Whether you mean the future by day or month or year, we cannot see it; it is veiled from us, or our eyes are holden that they may not see it; and herein is a gracious, tender mercy. If you knew for a certainty that you would die this day ten years, you would feel that you were holding a wasting lease, and that it was not really worth your while to do this or that, for ten years are but a handful. Yet we may die to-morrow. It is better we should not know the time of death; better that some things should be known only to God. Jesus Christ plainly told us that there was one thing of which even He was ignorant, that none knew it but the Father, because He was the Father He kept it back—do not tell them when, or you will disorganise the universe. Infinitely better that some things should be kept in the iron safe, so to say, or the strong room, of eternity; better that the Father alone should

know certain days and certain hours. There is an appointed time to man upon the earth, and God will not tell us when that time occurs. Otherwise we could not live; the joy would go out of the wedding day and the birthday, and the belfry accustomed to ring out in jubilation and clangour great anniversaries and splendid occasions would itself be turned, as it were, into frost and ice, and it would speak no more its metallic music. Under some circumstances therefore it is better not to know; infinitely better not to see. The life of which you are in quest is just within reach, but you do not know it; the life that would redeem your life from despair is only a day's march off, but no man can tell when the incoming ship will be signalled, or when the incoming train will give its last throb into the station. It is better so. Lord, Thy will, not mine, be done.

The occasion of opening our eyes shows us in what a big universe we live. Our tendency is to belittle everything. Some persons would be quite contented to regard their own particular parish, district, province, or congregation as the utmost limit of the universe; that is to say, there may be great territory beyond these privileges, but it is only unmapped territory, a chaotic geography, infinite masses of nothingness; the true universe is within the four walls of the house we live in, or certainly within the four walls of the church we worship in. Yet every now and then our eyes are opened; there is another man we never saw before; and yonder is a country of which we never dreamed; and I hear there are human voices. What is this universe? *What?* The question stands like a mark of interrogation in the very centre of the sun. Only God knows how big His own universe is.

Poor Hagar was dying of thirst, and the great boy was tugging at her for help, and she had none; and the Lord opened Hagar's eyes, and she saw that she was within hand-reach of a well, and never knew it. The wells are all there if we did but know it. "There standeth One among you whom ye know not; He it is." The well was there all the time; God created no well for Hagar, He only opened

Hagar's eyes that she might see the well that was there. In many ways God shows us how near His love is and how delicately His beneficent providence is addressed to our pressing necessities. We have all read of that shell that was shot by the Russians at Sevastopol into the British camp; we almost saw it, so graphic was the description, fall into the earth, and the great masses of earth leaping up, and presently, the British camp greatly needing water, there was a great gush of living water from a rock that had been shattered by the shell, and the stream was relieved, leaped up, and fell in blessings at the very feet of the men who needed the water. So it often is. The enemy shoots great shells into our lives, we ourselves are none the worse for this great rush of intended destruction, but the shell breaks some lid of a rock, and that lid being shattered the water leaps out, and comes to us as an unexpected blessing. Let God have His way; stand back, thou little meddler, and let thy Father rule!

Our eyes are holden that we should not see all the processes and opportunities of civilisation. Man does not like the word revelation; he thinks it has a church odour. But the little creature has taken up with another word; he must have a word, poor two-legged insect! he will not have the word revelation, but he will have the word invention; it fits him better, it hits the measure of his little size. But, religiously interpreted, what is invention but revelation? The telephone was in Eden; not as a telephone, but in all that the telephone means. In Eden? Why, in Eden it is quite an old commonplace; it was in eternity; eternity is but a day old; go further, it was in God. Man liked it, however, better when he called it an invention and patented it and made a livelihood out of it, and said to his soul (excuse the poetry!), Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, live on this telephone, eat, drink, and be merry, for I have patented it. I speak now under circumstances that to our forefathers would have been deemed laughable and incredible; in addressing you I am addressing the hospitals of London. I have been entreated to have microphones placed in this pulpit so that people at the hospitals, the hospital for Incurables and many

other asylums of disease and distress, sufferers are gathered around their tables at this moment, and I am glad that they have heard the thrilling music which has resounded under this roof, and perhaps some word of prayer or meditation, uttered under the inspiration of God by my own lips, may find a lodgment in the memory of their hearts. I send my sympathetic love to all these listening invalids ; they hear every tone I am uttering, and I say to them in their solitude and in their pain, God help you, God be gracious unto you ! “ Invention ” is an atheistic word ; it shuts out God. Revelation is a religious term, and brings in God, and sets Him at the head of things. Man likes to play the atheist—for a little time. It may seem remarkably clever, cleverer than anybody that ever lived before in the whole universe, because the atheist knows that there is no God ; and to know that there is no God must be to have been everywhere, as John Foster says, because if we have not been everywhere God may be in the very place where we have not been. But man loves the word “ invention,” there is something mechanical about it and a sniff of commercial air in it ; it is something that one day may become the subject of a patent and a lawsuit, and man likes this kind of activity. He prefers speculation to religion : and verily I say unto you he has his reward.

Oh, if we could have foreseen some days we could not have lived ! If you could have foreseen the ruin of your child, boy or girl ! When the boy went away, when the girl was drawn aside, when your life was utterly changed ; if you could have foreseen that day suicide might have been preferable to its realisation. You died seven deaths when the child died ; when the child died morally, spiritually ; when that young tender life took itself out of the branch and out of the root ; well that you did not see it ! What a glorious privilege that our eyes were holden so that the tearing and the rending of our life came upon us quite suddenly, when the lifetime was crushed into three months ; when all the nightmares and awful apprehensions of life were crowded into one day’s pulsation. What a mercy that we did not see all this ten years ago ! we should have been disabled for that period of time ; we should have lost nerve and courage and hope and

joy ; it would have been a period of ten years' living dying ; but our eyes were holden that we should not see it. If you could have foreseen the loss of all your money—it went, as it were, in a moment. But you got a good deal of enjoyment out of the wealth whilst you had it. Your eyes were holden that you should not see the thief that was coming to steal your treasure. So it is a privilege that we know not the day of our death. I know I may die to-night, I feel I may live a year or years. God says to me, Poor child of mortality, it is infinitely better that thou shouldst not know anything about it ; go on steadily, loyally, hopefully, with thy work, and when it is time for thee to leave the plough, though it be left in mid-furrow, and another man shall complete that furrow, I will come for thee. Till I come, occupy !

PRAAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have taken all Thy deliverances, and have not believed Thee. We have made use of God, we have found in Him an occasional theology; but we are bruised all over our heart by wounds inflicted by the enemy, wounds of unbelief and obstinacy and self-regard. We are poor creatures at the best; we have a long creed, but no faith; now and again we almost believe Thee, but not wholly; we do not take the decisive leap into the arms and bosom of God; we hold on to things seen and finite and vanishing by one hand, and dimly and uncertainly clutch at some superstition with the other. So the devil beats us in the war, the night vanquishes the most glittering stars, and the wind blows down our altars, which are built partly in belief and mainly in superstition. How broken is our life, how uncertain; how it trembles under the daily burden! We do not feed upon the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we do not live on the Cross, and for the Cross, and by the power of the Cross; our feet are still on the earth, and now and then we look down to the dust if haply we might find all the God we want lying at our feet. The Lord pity us; the Lord send showers of tears upon our broken lives! Amen.

XXXV.

PARTIAL TRUTH.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, JUNE 29TH, 1899.

"In this thing ye did not believe the Lord your God."—DEUT. i. 32.



THESE are the great battles of the world. Not the clang of swords and the roar of kingdoms, but the conflict of man with God,—man calling God a liar; these are the disastrous and fatal wars. You shudder at the idea of military war; you cannot bear the noise of the guns, the clash of the contending men; you are nervous and timid and shrinking; you pride yourselves on sensitiveness and very tender-hearted refinement. It may all be a lie! This very morning you may have doubted the Word of God, and set up your little will in combat against God's will, you may have lifted a fist against the heavens, and then gone to church to sing psalms without souls. Why do we not look at the reality and inwardness of things? why are we so very sensitive about war and bloodshed? and why do we get up memorials to governments about war and against war and for peace, all being so very tender and so very sensitive? And this morning you may have affronted the Most High and set up your will against the decree infinite. That was the point at which you should have been nervous and sensitive and refined. Pity us, angels! We think ourselves refined because we shrink from the taste of hot blood, and then go and secretly disobey the God that made us.

We are often called upon to contemplate what may be called partial faith. We have faith in spots; we are mainly bruises of unbelief, wounds of unconfessed but deadly atheism; yet here and there, leopard-like or zebra-like, we are spotted and studded with pieces of detached piety. How true this is let every man bear witness on his own account. We do believe some

things, but generally they are things of no importance. We believe things that cost us nothing. Who believes the thing that has a Cross, wet with red blood, in the middle of it? We are all partially religious, whimsically religious, religious after a very arbitrary and mechanical fashion. A discourse might be preached on whimsical religiousness. It is marvellous how the conscience is trained in little dots and short lines, and how the total manhood is left in a practically atheistic condition. Man is most whimsical when he is religious. He cultivates special points, and if you do not cultivate precisely the same points he is not sure that you can be going to heaven. How whimsical is semi-converted man! What poet can satirize him? what Juvenal can mock him with satire sufficiently biting? He will sell you at church a hymn-book on the Lord's Day, but if you asked to buy the sermon as well as the hymn-book he would call it Sabbath-breaking! He always dusts the soles of his boots, but if he were to clean the upper leather on Sunday morning, he would not for the world be seen in the act; for he observes the Lord's Day! Out upon this partial, whimsical, mechanical, hypocritical piety! Let us have health, reality, soundness of faith, and completeness according to our measure.

We see what is meant by partial faith when we contemplate a vision which comes before us every day of our life, and that is the vision of partial character. Where is there a man that is all reprobate? The son of perdition occurs but now and then in the rolling transient centuries. Who is there who has not some good points about him? How we magnify those points into character; how the man himself takes refuge in these scattered or detached virtues, and builds himself a reputation upon these incoherent fragments! Always the great challenge falls upon us from the angry clouds, In this thing, in that thing, ye did not believe; at this point you suspended your faith, at that point you were a practical atheist; and know ye, say the angry clouds, the chain is no stronger than its weakest link. Would you trust a chain thirty links long if you were sure that one of the links was very weak? What would you think of the reasoning which said, Certainly one of the links is not to be depended upon for a moment, but it is only one in thirty, there are nine-and-twenty links

perfectly strong, thoroughly serviceable, you may trust your whole weight to them ; and what is one in thirty ? Which one ? Why ask which one ? why not go by the majority of the links - nine-and-twenty links—hands up for strength ; one link in a base minority. Ay, but which link ? You are quite right. Why not be logical, why not be consistent, and apply the same thing and the same doctrine to the integrity and the completeness of your own character ? You are no stronger than your weakest point ; study that weak point ; repair, amend, or remove it, or replace it by some point worthy of the rest of the character. That would be commonsense, that would be downright logic worthy of the market-place. Why not accept it and realise it ?

We all believe in Providence. Which providence ? how much providence ? in what seasons do we believe in providence ? We are great believers in blossoming-time, but what faith have we when the snow upon our path is six feet deep and the wind a hail and frost ? The Lord has many fine-day followers. There is not a man in all the populations of the globe that would not believe in any God after receiving a fortune of fifty thousand pounds, no matter where it came from. That kind of hypocritical evaporation or sentiment is often mistaken for a belief in providence. When a man has had ten thousand pounds unexpectedly left to him, he is prone to sing, "God moves in a mysterious way." Hypocrite ! He is mayhap, notwithstanding his psalm-singing, a hypocrite ; he has no faith, he does not understand the meaning of faith, which is self-transformation into the very bosom of God. Faith is not to be measured by your assent to a few little critical, catechetical dogmas. A man is not saved as to his soul by simply assenting to so many points, items, or articles in an ecclesiastical creed. A man is what he is in his heart, no matter what he may profess. All things must be determined by the heart, for with the heart alone man believeth unto righteousness.

We often hear of some persons who are remarkably sound on certain doctrines. I dread to hear of any man who is particularly sound on any one doctrine, because I have the suspicion that he is magnifying his

soundness upon that doctrine that he may ingratiate himself into my confidence so far as to inoculate me with some peculiar heresy of his own. Let us beware how we fix upon certain articles or upon certain dogmas, and judge all men by their acceptance or rejection of them. As we have said before, what would be thought of any man who was partial to certain letters of the alphabet, and remarkably sound upon the consonants, or who held two of the vowels with most pious and clinging faith, who would lay down his intellectual life for the vowel *a* and for the vowel *o*, but who would take leave to cherish his own suspicions with regard to the soundness of the other vowels? What of the man who is strong upon the letter *b*, but a little heretical upon the letter *z*? You would instantly, if silently, think whether the man was quite sane. Yet this is precisely what is done among the doctrines of the great Biblical theology. We are strong at points, we are furious about certain lines, we go into a passion in maintaining such and such dogmas; as for the others, they may take care of themselves. This is God's charge against us by the mouth of His prophets and apostles—"Yet in this thing ye did not believe." We must not only be careful about what we do believe, but about what we do not believe; we must see where our strength lies and where our weakness lurks. We must remember the doctrine we have just laid down, and which is the common property of the intellectual world, that a chain is no stronger than its weakest link.

Do we really believe in Providence?—in the shepherdly God, in the fatherly God, in the motherly God, in the God of the silent step, who comes with the noiselessness of a sunbeam into the chamber of our solitude and desolation? Do we really believe in the God who fills all space, yet takes up no poor man's room, and who is constantly applying to broken or wounded hearts the balm that grows only in old sweet Gilead? Do we believe that the very hairs of our head are all numbered? Are we perfectly sure that if God should take away this one little child of ours, the only child, that all would be well? How deep is our faith in Providence? I want Habakkuk's great sounding faith; he said about fig-trees and

herbs and flocks and olive-yards that if they were all swept away yet he would trust in God and strike his harp to the praise of the Almighty Father. I am not so old in faith as mighty Habakkuk, I could see many trees blighted without losing my faith, but there is one tree, if aught should happen to any single branch or twig of that tree, my soul's faith would wither as a blossom would wither under the breath of nightly frost; in that thing I should fail. What, then, can be my faith, if it is true, and it is true, that a chain is no stronger than its weakest link? Lord, save me, or I perish!

We believe in prayer. How much? At what time do we believe in prayer? Do we believe in a particular providence, and do we so deeply believe in that providence that we would ask God to intervene and save us from the final disaster? Is there not a time when prayer itself becomes dumb? Are there not periods of agony in life in which we dismiss all around, and look with dumb sorrow upon the unheeding heavens? It is in vain that we say we believe in prayer, and that we lament for those who do not pray, if our prayer does not stand us in good stead in the hour and article of life's extremest agony. In that hour we may not be able to use the words of prayer, but there is a wordless liturgy, there is a look that prays, there is a sighing laden with supplications and petitions for which there are no fit and adequate words. Will our faith in prayer go with us into the deepest part of the valley? or is it a mocking faith that can exert its influence only when the sun shines and the broad-fronted morning blesses the hills with a common kiss? Remember the possibility of our having a partial faith, a partial faith in Providence, a partial faith in prayer, and remember that the chain is no stronger than its weakest point, and if in this thing or that we do not believe the Lord our God we may strike the rest of our faith dead as with a sword-stroke. Lord, save me, or I perish!

What we want, then, is an all-round faith; in other words, what we want is an all-the-year-round faith. But our faith comes in fits and starts. Perhaps this may be accounted for by the fact that we have con-

founded the word creed with the word faith. Creed is weather, faith is climate; creed is a variable alphabet, faith is an eternal poetry. We live on faith, we walk by faith; without faith we have no life. As to our creed, take it, leave it, read it, despise it, adopt it, do what you like with it, but faith abides for ever, sometimes requiring new words and new modes, but never changing its inward and divine substance and meaning. Hast thou faith? I do not ask thee to fret me with thy poor money-bought creed. The year is three hundred and sixty odd days long, and I want a faith that will go with me to the last tick of the last hour of the whole year. I do not want my faith to glance at me or touch me occasionally or send balmy messages to me now and again; I say to my faith, Come not to sojourn, but abide with me; remain always in my heart! never leave me, never forsake me; I leave the creed to the changing language, but my faith I never put into any custody but Thine own heart, Thou Father-Mother God, Thou King of the stars!

Let every man apply this text to himself. Let no man charge another about this merely occasional or spasmodic faith. Now and again we hear men say, My faith could not rise to that height. The words should never be lightly spoken; they are an impeachment against the soul, they throw a doubt upon the soul's name being written in the book of life. I can do all things through Christ enabling me. Sometimes I may ask for a little patience, now and again I may say, Give me time; once more I may assure you that I am faint yet pursuing; my face is in the right direction; do not judge me by sudden expressions or extemporaneous confessions of weakness, but judge me by the substance and essence of my character; for I am able to say through all the cloud of sin and all the misery of self-impeachment, Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee. That is the true faith. So long as that love lingers in the heart hell shall not have thee, nor the gates of hell prevail against the rock on which you build.

This is very serious. This reflection makes life very

solemn. Some of us have thought too much that we could take up our faith and set it down, that we may believe a little of this and a little of that; some of us have not thought much of the roundness of the orb of faith. Let us not give way to censoriousness upon others. You do not know how hard it is for some men to believe. It may be comparatively easy for you and me to believe, but there is a natural obstinacy for which we cannot account, a hardness and rebelliousness of heart which sets itself against God, against the supernatural, and against what is termed the unthinkable. Others of us find a tabernacle in ideality, a castle in the sunshine, a grand opening for the exercise of the finest imagination in all the unmeasured space of an incalculable firmament. But other men are born otherwise; they are born with a rock in their hearts, they have no faculty of faith, as we should say; they cannot imagine, they cannot dream, they cannot idealise; they never see a parable in the opening blade, in the growing ear, and in the outfilling of the harvest purpose which makes the landscape purple and fills the earth with a psalm of thankfulness; to such men, all this is poetry, they do not follow it. We must be gentle with them; they are not necessarily dishonest men, nor are they necessarily bad men, but they are incomplete men, and at one point of their character, and that the principle point, they are weak men; we must regard them as warnings and not as examples. But we who are strong should bear the infirmities of the weak; we should be patient with the slow, we should desire that other men may know the joy and the blessedness and the triumph and the glory of the full life. Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the patient; for they shall be patient with infirmity. Let us pray God that He will forgive our periods of not-believing. Though we saw His victories, and ate His bread, and drank His water flowing out of the rock, yet we had our doubts about Him; we speculated where we should have adored, and we raised up questions where we should have preached with a deeper earnestness and served with a deeper obedience. Lord, save me, or I perish!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou art the Redeemer of Israel, and Thou wilt perfect Thy purpose of love, and the whole earth shall be filled with the knowledge of Thy name and the splendour of Thy kingdom. We bless Thee that we live upon the oath of God, we stand back in the tabernacle of Thy covenant, we know that Thy purposes shall be redeemed and fulfilled, and that all Israel shall rejoice to sing the song of triumphant, divinest love. Thou didst thunder with a great thunder upon the Philistines and blind the warriors when they came up to assail praying Israel ; Thou didst give godless Israel into their hands, and they trod them underfoot and held them in extreme contempt ; when the prophet slew the sacrifice and the people cried unto him to pray for them continually, then Thou didst hurl Thy thunder upon the Philistines and utterly bewilder and dismay the foe. It is to this God we trust ; Thou wilt bring in the fulness of the Gentiles, Thou wilt drive away by the power of the Cross, the atoning, redeeming Cross, all evil, all darkness, and Thy Church shall be beautiful as a jewel made for Thine own wearing. Amen.

XXXVI.

RE-CONQUESTS.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, JULY 6TH, 1899.

"The cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel."—I SAM. vii. 14.



THE whole verse reads: "And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath; and the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites." The Amorites liked neither the Philistines nor Israel, but they all thought it preferable to fall into the hands of the latter. We are driven to the adoption of alternatives. On one great occasion a sufferer said, Let me fall into the hands of God; for it is better to fall into the hands of God than to fall into the hands of men.

The cities were "restored"; that is to say, they did once belong to Israel, but Israel had a period of unbelief, even of practical atheism. Unbelief is weakness, in the market-place as certainly as in the Church. Do not suppose that unbelief is a theological term; it is a term that runs right through the whole web and woof of human language and intercourse. Israel had sinned grievously. Technically Israel would not abandon the true Jehovah, but practically Israel said, Can there be any harm in the multiplication of gods? we have no wish to depose Jehovah, we desire above all things to honour Jehovah, but we want some gods of our own that we can more immediately bring into action, and gods will take the word from our lips instead of our taking the word from their lips; can we not have

some strange gods—Ashtaroth and Baalim and others? The Lord will not have a divided heart, He will not occupy the house with Ashtaroth; either the Ark must give way or Dagon must fall; they cannot both abide on equal terms under the same roof: choose ye this day whom ye will serve. You can have all the gods you want, but you cannot have Jehovah along with them; you can have Jehovah, but all the other gods must go. Israel had a period of vacillation, not knowing for one whole day together whether to have one God or many gods; Israel went a-lusting and a-whoring after other idols, and the Lord forsook Israel. Then Israel became as dry paper before a scorching fire; the Philistines came down upon them, and utterly overwhelmed them, and trampled them underfoot. This was the Lord's doing. Now and again He lets us see what we are when we are not His, when we do not keep the oath, when we trifle with the holy covenant; then all the winds are against us and all the stars, and the four seasons are four enemies. Who can stand before the anger of the Lord? Israel came to see this, and Israel cried to Samuel, saying, We have done wrong; sacrifice for us; cry continually unto the Lord on our behalf. Cowardly Israel was afraid because the Philistines were too many when the Lord was not on the side of His own army. And Samuel slew the sacrifice, and offered it, and Israel repented, and the Lord turned; and one day when the Philistines came up against Israel the Lord shouted at them with thunder, and they knew not whence that terrible voice came, their knees knocked together, and their hands lost their expertness, and their eyes mistook friends for enemies and enemies for friends; and the Lord turned the battle against the Philistines, and all the cities which they had taken from Israel were restored to Israel when Israel got back her faith. Faith is power; unbelief is weakness.

How poetical and suggestive is the word "restored"! They were brought back again. The cities that had been taken by the Philistines were recovered by Israel; that is to say, by believing and penitent and broken-hearted Israel; all the cities were taken

back, from Ekron even unto Gath, and in the hand of the Philistine there was no relic of triumph; the Lord stripped the enemy, and drove him out naked and trembling and ashamed. "Restored"—the word comes into use in many departments and phases of life. We speak of a man being restored to confidence. For a time confidence had been forfeited by some real or imaginary demerit; then came the period when the public mind was enlightened, when fuller evidence was produced, when a calmer judgment prevailed; little by little suspicion was dispelled, and finally the suspected and injured man was restored to confidence, and to more than confidence, to honour, was welcomed with enthusiasm, and was set among the uncrowned kings of men. What the word restoration must mean to a man like Dreyfus! who can explain his conception of that term? He stands to-day the most ill-used man these nineteen centuries. But it is not Dreyfus that will need to be restored, it is France that needs restoration. How France is to be restored to the confidence of civilisation I know not. Shame upon shame be to those who, even if the verdict had been just, have heaped torture upon torture, indignity upon indignity, upon the unfortunate and miserable victim of the wrath of an army on whose behalf I cannot conceive any honest man speaking one word of favour. Does not a case like the case of Dreyfus belong to a nation? It does not, it belongs to humanity, it belongs to civilisation, and civilisation ought to speak out fearlessly and unmistakably. I would not give three months' purchase for the tranquillity of a nation that has acted as France has acted in this case of Dreyfus. Thanks be to every duke, earl, king, prince, author, journalist, who has sent some message of sympathy to the man who is loaded with such ineffable sorrow. How I should welcome him to this place to-day if such an honour were permitted to me! Whatever he has done, he has suffered too much. That Isle of the Devil should be bought by civilisation, and either burned out of existence or planted as a garden in which there should be memorials of repentance and sorrow over the most wicked of all outrages. If I could send a message to Dreyfus in my own name and

yours, it would be to keep up his heart and trust in God and have faith in the people.

Coming to the historical lines of the narrative, we have to dwell upon reconquests, upon the taking back of cities which we ought never to have lost. I do not speak of cities in the ordinary sense of the term, but I speak of the great losses which the Church—meaning by the term Church all its sections and communions—has forfeited or lost or unworthily abandoned. There will be a great day of restoration; the Church of Christ has much property to reclaim. The Philistines must be stopped; they have run away with much, and we have not been robust enough and fearless enough to cry, Stop, thief! We have let the enemy take nearly everything, and we have recushioned our pews, and sat more softly that we might the more easily drop into slumber. The watcher of the Church is dead; the great spirit that should have arrested this pilfering, thieving, and depletion, is soaking itself in the literature of the day, and modernising eternity into an anecdote or a sentence of the most trivial gossip. The thief likes it; the thief says, The Church is going to permit us to take more; let us take all we can, let us sack the Church, and let her wake up some day to find that she has nothing, and that the so-called cities which she holds are not worth the paper on which their names are written. But there shall come another day, a great day of restoration and reclamation; “kings shall minister unto thee; in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy upon thee. . . . The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted.” The Lord is on the warpath, and He will redeem His people, and the enemy shall disgorge the stolen plunder. The Church is very guilty in all this matter; the Church has let one thing slip after another. (Always understand that by the word Church in such discourses is meant the whole redeemed Church throughout the world, apart from denominationalism or sectarianism or limitation of any kind whatsoever.) The consequence is that the Church is surrounded by a number of little military houses from the windows of which popguns are being continually fired, largely in

mockery, and mainly because nearly all the Church property has been stolen.

We shall reclaim all that has been pilfered. Agnosticism will have to give up its purse and its pass-book and its cheque-book and its balance. Agnosticism is the meanest of the thieves. Its name was invented only yesterday; it was baptised in a ditch, it has done no good for the world, but it has troubled a good many people in the Church on the subject of the unknowableness or unthinkableness of God. The Church ought never to have been troubled or disturbed for one moment. Agnosticism is one of its own Bible doctrines; we as Christian believers are all agnostics, in the true Biblical sense of the term: "No man hath seen God at any time; no man can see God and live; God is great, and we know Him not; who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?" That is the true agnosticism. There is a line where knowledge ceases or vanishes away, and where the great spiritual kingdom becomes a kingdom without words, without definitions of a final kind, a kingdom of light and song and joy unspeakable. Why do we not realise this? Why do we, poor invalids—for the most of believers, I am afraid, are not well—allow persons to steal one of our principal doctrines, the doctrine of the unknowableness of God? To know God is to be God; only God can know God; time cannot grasp eternity. But we believe in revelation, having the revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ His Son, and we hail the Son of God under the great name Immanuel, God with us—looking at us, stooping to us, teaching us, dying for us and rising again that we may share the triumph and the peace of His immortality. It was thought at one time that the Philistines, having taken to themselves a great city called Agnosticism, would overthrow the Church. The Church of Christ in the degree of her penitence and faith is firmer to-day than she ever was. No man can take her crown if she keeps up her praying; everything depends upon that arrangement. The poorest, meanest thief can steal your diadem if you cease your intercession. So long as we live in God, so long as we live and move and have our being in God, the Lord will not

suffer the depletion to continue ; He will thunder upon the Philistines, and drive them away before the uproar of His thunder into any wilderness that will bid them welcome to its inhospitableness.

And then the Philistines have built another hut which is called Secularism. Man likes a word which he thinks is practical and intelligible. Man loves to keep up a shop with a counter in it ; man would not be happy if he had not a till, that is a box or drawer, unseen by the public, admission into which, so far as the public are concerned, is by a very small slit in the counter. Man calls that business. He does not care for religion, he cares for the secular aspects of life ; he can understand these, but he cannot understand metaphysics, philosophies, theologies ; so he puts another penny in the slot and sees that nobody else takes it out. This he thinks is commerce. He does not pray, he does not sing, he attends no place of worship. The poor foolish man forgets that this world is God's as well as any other world that may be gleaming in the nearer universe or shining in a universe beyond the ken of our telescope. He forgets that godliness has the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. Christianity is the religion of industry, honesty, thrift, neighbourliness, cleanliness, and all the social virtues and excellencies. One would think, from certain observations made by people who have no imaginable right ever to open their mouths, that religion was nothing but an attitude of clasped hands and upturned eyes, a religion that leaves the whole earth to cultivate itself or to go to ruin. That is not so ; God is the creator of the ploughman ; God teaches the husbandman how to go about his work ; the harrow belongs to God, and all the harvesting is part of the Divine Providence. He who does not work should not eat : we only say, Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and then all these things shall be added unto this great wealth. So when your young disciples—I speak now to ministers and teachers—run away with the idea that they are secularists, you should call after them, So am I ! but we must come to definition and to the right application of terms. No Christian treats

wealth without regard, no truly pious man despises business; the man who prays best will work best in the city or in the field or on the sea. Prayer is genius in all directions. He who prays best conquers most. We ought never, therefore, to have allowed the secularist to take anything from the Church. Anything that the secularist holds which is really precious and good belongs to the Church, and we should have it back, and take all the cities again in honest restoration which for the moment have been wrenched from the grasp of our unbelief.

There is now a wonderful partition, mainly of lath and plaster, put up between religion and what is called science. There ought to be no such partition. Science is theological; there is nothing excluded from the grasp and the dominion of a true theological genius and conception of things. The laboratory is a chamber in the Church; every retort ought to be claimed by the Church as a special instrument or resource or piece of furniture; the Lord has made the inventory, and that retort belongs to God. Stop, thief! back! The Church has itself to blame. There is nothing in all the empire of true knowledge that is not ruled over by the spirit of a true theology. We cannot be equally strong at all points, so far as our individual gift or faculty is concerned; one man may be stronger in philosophy than in science, another may be stronger in science than in philosophy, but they may both belong to one another. The theologian and the man of science ought not to live on hostile terms; it does not become either of them to abuse the other. Let us welcome all discoveries; and if the man of science calls them discoveries, and the man of piety calls them revelations, well, they may really both be meaning the same thing; they speak different languages. Let us understand, therefore, that whatever is true in arithmetic, geology, astronomy, chemistry, or any other science is part of the sacramental plate of the Church, and no man must run away with it without being proclaimed a sacrilegious thief. We must enlarge the definition of the Church. It has largely been reduced to a very small account of hymn-books, and chant-books, and to ministers more or less underpaid. We have famished the

word Church, we have reduced that great word to an almost skeleton ; whereas the Church, redeemed by the blood of Christ, regenerated and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, is the Bride of the Lamb, and on her head she wears a diadem in which there are jewels of every colour, of science and art and learning and civilisation. We must therefore retake from Philistine hands terms and properties and provinces which have been stolen from us, either while we were faithlessly slumbering, or in some hour in which our belief gave way and let the devil come in like a flood. I call upon young preachers of every name and class to reclaim stolen cities for God. All the cities belong to God, and He must have them every one. But there may be a city of darkness. Bring it ! God in His power has stars enough to light the gloomiest city that darkens any corner of His universe.

When rights are restored there will be a new distribution of cities and of all manner of wealth. Then the missionary will stand very near the head of the conquering host. The man who has created civilisation, meaning by that term the civilising and refining influences of Christianity, is the great man. The poor missionary will one day be recognised, hailed. At present he has a hard time of it ; he is seldom on the sunny side of the wall. If you mention some great missionary to some frivolous-minded drinker of the cup of blood, the cup of sacrament, he or she may ask, Who is he ? The missionary, that ought to be better known than tsar or kaiser or king, is inquired about as if he were an anonymous character. If I could send word to the mission-field to-day in India and New Guinea, in Africa and in Polynesia, it would be, Let not your hearts be troubled ; go on with your work ; many that are first shall be last, and many that are last shall be first ; and when the cities are reclaimed and redistributed the men who created civilisation or uprooted barbarism will be reckoned among the princes of God. They are seldom welcomed now. The teacher will one day be better known than the warrior. We write poems to warriors, we hail them at civic feasts. I have never known a teacher, a great teacher, toasted and saluted at a civic revel. What matter ? Hearts

up! peace hath her conquests no less renowned than war; your day is coming, and the man who has taught another mind shall be hailed when the warrior is forgotten. But we are all more or less tainted with the disease of littleness. Somebody is now making, according to a journal whose name at this moment escapes me, and I do not regret that fact, a sword with a gold handle and a blade set in precious stones. Who is the man for whom the sword is made? A city missionary? a teacher? a preacher? a philosopher? a leader of the gentler ministries of life? No! The sword shall perish, and moral enthusiasm, spiritual purity, true holiness of heart, shall live when swords are turned into agricultural instruments, and the wearers and bearers of them are forgotten. There will be a great reclaiming of cities, cities of property, cities of fame, cities of gold, cities that have been taken from us in a moment of unbelief; all coming back if we be faithful, and we shall only be rewarded in the degree of our faithfulness, not in the degree of our intellectual brilliance, not in the degree of our power of unbelief, not in the degree in which we have been doing mischief, not in the degree in which we have been shouting hallelujah to some unworthy hero; but all will come back to Christ's Church in the degree in which Christ's Church is pure, simple, true, wise, vigilant. Then kings shall minister unto her, and it will be the highest renown to have one's name written on her imperishable records.

PRAYER.

LORD, teach us how to pray ! If we pray well we shall live well. Lord, teach us how to pray ! Show us that prayer must come from the heart, and must pass by way of the Cross to the footstool of the throne. There is none other way ; it is broad, brighter than the day, and written with the words of welcome expressive of Thy love. Let no man despair ; may the dumb pray, may the lifelong silent break out into praise ; let this be creation day and resurrection morning in one glad revelation of Thy mercy and Thy grace. We would praise Thee ; we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and fearful and wonderful have been Thy ways towards us and concerning us ; our life is bathed in mystery, we cannot tell the springs thereof, and the outgoings thereof no man may calculate. We accept our life as a divine trust, we bow before its awful mysteries, we are thankful for the revelations which gladden it, and we would pray for the obedient spirit to follow Thee in all Thy leadership, thou God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherein we have taken our lives into our own hands, we bow down before Thee in burning shame ; we thought to displace God ! Our ambition and our selfishness conspired against the Most High ; behold, we were taken in our own net, we fell into the pit which our own hands had digged, and we are here to say, God pity us ! for we have done wrong, and let us cling to the Cross, wherein is all our hope. We were led away by our own vanity, and ensnared by our own ambition, and we thought we might boast of to-morrow ; when lo ! Thou didst suddenly send upon us sevenfold darkness, and we stumbled and fell, and lay down in utterest helplessness, not knowing one way from the other. But Thou hast broken down our spirit, Thou hast by sore chastening of our life brought us to humbleness of mind, and filial dependence of will ; Thou hast rebuked our imagination, and led us into the temple of faith. We review our life, and are lost in wonder, love, and praise ; we see now how near the edge of the precipice we were now and again and yet again ; we now understand Thy rebukes, and how suddenly Thou didst bring us back from the way our hearts longed to walk in. We praise Thee because Thou didst not answer some of our prayers ; for they were conceived in vanity and spoken in foolishness, and we knew not what we said when we took our life into

our own hands. Jesus, still lead on ! May we have grace enough to live one day at once ; may we depend upon the Arm that cannot weaken ; may we look to the light which no storm can blow out ; may our eyes be unto the hills where stands God's own eternal temple. May we no longer live in the external and circumstantial and transient, but in the internal, the spiritual, and the everlasting ; may we know that we are ordained to the altar, consecrated to the sanctuary, that upon us is the mark of the blood of Calvary, and we are no longer of the mob wandering in the ways of darkness. May we know our calling and our election of God, and answer the same with pureness and patience and thanksgiving, thus making our life a life-psalm, a daily holy sacrifice. We live among broken hearts, we build our houses by the brink of the grave ; the living and the dead are housed under one roof : teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom ; give us that sense of dominion over things outward and calculable that shall also give us the higher sense of things divine, eternal, things in which we may rest, finding there eternal Sabbath. Some are weary, disappointed, sorely vexed, deeply afflicted, not knowing which way to turn ; the house is dark even on this sunny summer morning, the shades of death have put out the lights of summer : the Lord look upon such, and see them through the tears of His pity. Some are full of life and plan and high ambition and song, as if they would never grow old or never know the bowing-down of weakness : the Lord teach them gently, softly, that there is an appointed time to men upon the earth, and show them the outline of the near-lying grave ; and yet do not take from them their youth and red blood and hopefulness, but may they live well, for life's noon, and life's afternoon, and life's quiet evening. God be with the sons and daughters of affliction, with the children of pain, with those whose lifework is now concluded, and who are waiting in the shadows till the invisible chariot draws near. Heaven's broad blessing be upon us, and may we feel, through the power of the Cross, the atoning, redeeming blood of Christ, that we are now called to festival and joy and holy song. Amen

XXXVII.

LOOKING FOR THE WRONG THING.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 9TH, 1899.

"He hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him."—LUKE xxiii. 8-11.



AN is always fond of conjuring and frivolity and entertainment. He divides the word into many different meanings, parts of meanings and applications, but it all comes to the same thing, that man likes to see something, or kill something, or be amused by something, or be entertained in any way, the less costly the better.

The case before us is that of Herod. When Pilate knew that Jesus Christ belonged to Herod's jurisdiction he was right glad of it, an immense burden of responsibility was taken off his shoulders. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, who happened to be at Jerusalem at that time. Never was weary man more glad of unexpected rest than Pilate was when he heard that this illustrious but mysterious Prisoner belonged to some other man's jurisdiction. When Herod saw Jesus he was exceeding glad; it was in very deed the thing he had been waiting for day after day. Kings and rulers cannot rush into the streets to see all the irregular and eccentric characters which perplex the mind of the general populace; so they must have shows by command, and opportunities created by sovereign fiat or by personal charge. When Herod heard that Jesus Christ was actually in the house, he was not only glad, he was exceeding glad; for he was desirous to see Him of a long time, because he had heard many things of Him; he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him. A miracle all to oneself, a miracle at home, a domestic festival, an opportunity of seeing the Conjuror close at hand, and watching

the cunning manipulation, tracing the action of every finger, and marking well the expression of the eyes. This was Herod's opportunity. We all have that opportunity according to our varying conception of the term. When Herod saw Jesus he was exceeding glad. Then enrol him, if you please, as a disciple! No, he is not a disciple. But is not every man who attends a place of worship with a laugh upon his face a disciple of the living God? Not necessarily; a man may bow his head in prayer, and look down all the time into the face of the devil. The time comes, therefore, for analysis, discrimination, careful apportionment of claim and standing; the day of judgment comes wherein every Christian must judge himself. When a man is seen hastening to church with a broad smile upon a benignant face, hastening that he may take part in the first hymn or psalm, may he not be enrolled as a disciple? Perhaps not; the evidence you have supplied is not sufficient; more must be known about the case. We approach Christ through the heart; in relation to Christ and all Christly matters a man is what he is in his heart. There may be sadness on his face, great deep furrows torn up by the plough of grief, and the man may seem to be going rather to the house of sorrow than to the house of song. Judge nothing before the time; he may be happiest who looks least happy. There is a joy in melancholy. Where in joy there is not a touch of melancholy about the joy, dash the wine-cup to the dust, for there is no festival in such fire. The question therefore becomes very critical and very serious. It is awful to think that a man may be interested in religion, and yet may be irreligious. There is an irreligious religion; there is an interest in piety which is impious.

Let us look at this almost domestic idyll. "When Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad." No Christian was he, but he had heard the popular rumour and the common gossip about a young man, fair, solemn, of gentle face, who had spoken words that seemed to have no relation to the voice in which they were pronounced; a young man that could say, Woe unto you! through a sob that was choking his throat: a new rhetoric, a new music, a new way of

delivering judgment and forecasting doom. Herod did not trouble himself with the ethics of Christ, with the evangelical conception which He gave of the kingdom of God; Herod knew nothing about these things, but he had heard of tricks, conjurings, miracles, things quite marvellous; and where there is a will there is a way; and busy Herod, who could have turned off a thousand applicants on the ground that he was engaged, created a space for Christ, and said he was glad indeed to see this Man of Galilee, and was prepared to give Him the whole day for the study of those marvellous signs and tokens which were said to accompany His ministry.

Do we really understand the occasion? What was the effect on Christ of Herod's peculiar gladness? Shall we imagine Jesus Christ speaking this monologue:—My time has now come; I knew it would come and probably come unexpectedly; I have had to encounter public hostility, social animosity, the contempt of the proud, but now a great man, having heard of me, welcomes me to his house and makes me almost a guest instead of a prisoner; the occasion comes at last to men, we have only to wait and we shall get our deserts in the long run; I feel gratified and honoured by the attention of Herod, and I will now work any number of miracles for his entertainment, I will indeed show him miracles I have not shown to the public; he has asked for a whole day of my time, he is willing to suspend his judicial or official or regal functions in order to give me an opportunity of showing what I can do; I feel already free with a larger liberty than I have yet enjoyed. In such a speech the Gospel would have died. Jesus cannot be patronised; the Creator cannot be flattered; He returns all their lies to all the hypocrites. Jesus does not accept the glittering opportunity, He declines it; He walks on higher levels, He breathes a purer air. But surely Herod was a man worth placating? No. A man?—an insect, a worm. In relation to the eternal God there is no man worth placating in the common vulgar sense of that term. The only man with whom Jesus Christ will speak is the man of a broken heart; a broken and a contrite spirit He will not despise. If an old broken-down woman, carrying seven

sorrows like seven wounds, had tugged His robe, and asked Him to read the twenty-third psalm to her, He would have read it all, and waited until the holy balm had got well into the festering sores. Do you know that this Man is King of kings, Lord of lords? He who thinks he can do Christ a favour, in the sense of conferring a patronage, has not begun to understand even the outline of the infinite character of the Son of God.

The same thing is going on to-day, going on in this house, going on in nearly every heart. So the text is modern; it comes up with the hoar of nineteen centuries upon it, and with the hoar of all the centuries and all the ages, and yet it expresses the experience of the men of to-day. What do the men of to-day do? They go in search of the wrong thing; they miss the point. We are going to church, can that be wrong? Possibly; it may be an acted blasphemy. We have seats in the church, can that be wrong? It may be; it might be truer to my character to have seats in the synagogue of Satan. All depends upon spiritual realities, the inmost inwardness of things, the metaphysic of the metaphysic; God is a Spirit, and He must be worshipped in spirit and in truth; the Father seeketh such to worship Him. I am glad to go to church. Why? I like to hear good congregational singing. That is no reason. I like to hear a good sermon. What do you mean by a good sermon? Foam, froth, nothingness, entertainment, intellectual titillation? What do you mean? to have conscience roused, memory of guilt refreshed, pardon offered through the blood of the Cross? That is a good sermon, and there is no other sermon worth listening to. To hear the public estimate of preachers and their preaching! Let a man be doctrinal, Biblical, practical, and he will be voted heavy, dry, old. Yet he is on the only line that is worth traversing; he goes at the right pace, he goes along the right lines, he is destined to the right goal. Hear him, pray for him, account him prophet of the Lord, clothed with a mantle of sunshine, ordained by hands invisible. "I like to read the Bible." Why? What parts do you like? The historical parts, the short stories, the graphic narratives, the household idylls. Very good; what more? If nothing more, you have hardly begun to read the Bible at all; the Bible

is a revelation of God to man and a revelation of man to himself, and a revelation of sin to itself; and until we get into these deeper and more inward mysteries, we know nothing about the Bible. What is your standard? into what haunts do you flee when the soul is ill at ease? Your daily Bible is your autobiography; he who has eyes to read character and conduct aright could discover from my daily Bible what I am, what I have suffered, enjoyed, what I long for, hope for, live for. There is nothing in the Bible that is unimportant, but there is a central Bible, a Bible within the Bible, full of the spirit of revelation and worship, prophecy and evangelical exposition, and into that innermost circle of all the concentric circles we must find our way before we can form any estimate of the real compass and the real spirit of the Bible. Few men have read thee, O Book of God, for thou art a letter to the heart, to be read in the dusk of life, or in the morning twilight, when no one is present, when the air is listening as if nervously to take back to the Author of the letter some answer given in sigh or sob.

Jesus Christ answered Herod nothing. It is one of two things. When accused you must either answer nothing, or if you begin a defence you must complete it. This was the policy of Christ; He answered him never a word. He looked at Pilate as if Pilate were not in existence, through him, beyond him; and to Herod the face of Christ was the face of a stone. Jesus Christ would never talk about His miracles. The only man that was ever likely to elicit anything from Him about His miracles was Nicodemus. That ruler of the Jews came to Jesus at night with this great compliment, and this most veracious compliment: Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest except God be with him; they are not only miracles, they are miracles of a certain range and quality, they have an accent and a note of their own; they are not to be ranked with the conjurings and the necromancies of the ages; they are singular, peculiar, distinctive; no man can do these miracles, the miracles that Thou doest, except God. And Jesus answered, Except a man be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of

heaven,—the supreme miracle, the culminating miracle, the miracles towards which all other miracles were moving; the new man, the living miracle. We are not called upon to study the miracles, but to be the miracles. We are to be the deaf, the dumb, the blind, the lame, the dead, on whom the great revivals of Christ's energy shall operate, calling us up into speech and hearing and song and agility and manhood: that is the miracle towards which all other miracles of mine were lamely moving. I am not called upon to entertain some advanced thinker and to discuss with him the miracles of Christ; I am called upon to say, I was blind, and now I see. The Christian is to be the miracle, and not to write commentaries upon the miracles. No man can understand the manner of the miracles or has any right to speak about them until he has undergone the major or final miracle, testified in his own new life, expressed in his own consciousness, and verified by his own conduct.

And Herod and his men-of-war set Him at naught, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe—the purple of Rome, or the cambric of the rabbinic priesthood; anything gorgeous enough will do to express contempt of this man who in the presence of Herod is dumb, and accounted demented or infamously discourteous. We may not literally put on a purple robe, in fact we should never dream of doing such a thing, but in an ideal way we may send Christ back into the shadows of history clothed with the purple of admiration, or of some sort of literary appreciation; we may even go so far as to praise His moral system and then hand it over to oblivion because its very ideality makes it impracticable in an age of growing civilisation. Evolution has its perversion as well as its proper application. We may, if the word may be allowed, “evolute” Christ backward, or we may evolve Him into a shadow, a whisper, an echo, anything that removes Him from a dominating and disciplinary position in human life. We go to Christ with a standard which He never approved, or apply to Him a test which He has never regarded other than as with contempt, and because He does not satisfy our prejudices, and our aspirations, we send Him back into shadows where He is for ever lost. The worst

kind of homage that can be rendered to Christ is that of mere intellectual or even moral admiration. Christ does not reveal Himself to our wit, our imagination, or our æsthetic taste; He reveals Himself to broken and contrite hearts, and to them only will He show the infinite loveliness and charm of His personality. Christ came not to excite admiration, but to preach the kingdom of God, and to offer the love of God to all men conscious of sin, its burden, and its cruel torment. We cannot break up Christ into a miracle worker, a moralist, a speculator, the Socrates or the Solon of His own day or of any succeeding day. Christ must be received by the penitent heart as a whole, for if He is not received in the totality of His claim and offer He will consider Himself rejected and despised. We know the value of Herod's appreciation when we come to consider how Herod eventually treated the Lord. Herod the man was not filled with interest in the Christ; but Herod the speculator, the lover of mere excitement and wonder, was no doubt sincerely interested in the small matter of miracle working. This will never do. With my whole heart I beseech you to consider that Jesus Christ is not to be treated as a conjurer, or to be applauded as an idealist; He is to be received as the only and the infinite Saviour of the world.

We repeat all this, let me say again, in our own experience. We get from Christ just what we bring to Him. If we bring a humble heart to Christ we receive a blessing; if we come behind Him and touch Him with the fingers of faith, then the wound is stanchd and our youth is renewed. If we come, saying, Lord, I am blind and poor and ignorant, what wouldst Thou have me do? teach me Thy will, O God, and give me grace and strength to obey it all; then Jesus Christ will hold the sun standing still, and the moon shall not depart from Ajalon till the great largess of His heart be poured out upon such suppliant penitence and sincerity. The proud He sendeth empty away. He has no message to pride. The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost; this Man receiveth sinners and eateth with them. He that is whole needeth not a physician, but he that is sick. Jesus Christ cured

the sick, but He never cured a painted wound. Paint your flesh in all the colours of simulated agony, and Jesus will pass you with contempt: show Him one deep heart-gash—loss of husband, wife, child, friend—deep, holy, tender sorrow; conviction of sin, bitter self-accusation, and say, Jesus of Nazareth, look at me and help me! and you will be restored to youth and hope and highest consecration. After that your burden will still be there, but without weight; the tears will still be there, but without the salt and bitterness of sorrow. The Son of Man came to the sick, the afflicted, the sore of heart, but the proud, the respectable, the self-sufficing He sendeth empty away, and after them a wind of contempt.

PRAAYER

LET it please Thee, our Father in heaven, to receive our humble song and answer our contrite petition. We will sing of mercy and judgment, we will praise the Lord, yea, we will sing a new song unto our God, for He hath done marvellously, and His right hand is outstretched in wonder and power. We will not be dumb in the courts of our God, nor sullen, nor self-involved; we will go out of ourselves, and pour out our life in song—a sacrifice of the heart, a sweet-smelling savour unto the Lord. We cannot take all these things and not be thankful for them, for then would we divide their number and kill their quality; by thankfulness we multiply Thy mercies, and by a love-offering of the soul we see new things and revelations and lights in all the way of Thy providence. We will remember Thee for good; Thou dost make the light of the morning, and set the evening star in its place; Thou dost water every herb of the field, every grassblade, and Thine is the wondrousness of colour with which Thou dost clothe the shoulders of the summer. Thou dost grow wheat for us; the vineyard and the oliveyard are of Thy planting, and Thine angels watch them and bring them to the harvest fulness. As for our life, Thou dost beset us behind and before, and lay Thine hand upon us, and count the hairs of our head. How can we then be dumb in Thy courts? Our hearts would praise Thee, our souls would go out in ardent love, because the hand of the Lord hath touched us and we have dwelt in the tabernacle of His power. If we have done the things we ought not to have done—and these we humbly and penitently confess—it is because we are still on the earth, and in the flesh, and hunted by the enemy, and limited by time and space; but there is a better law in our members, there is a holier tone in our voices, and all the miserable sordidness of the week is run through and through as with the chords of a sacred song. Let the Lord hear us when we confess our sins and abase ourselves before the Cross and call upon the atoning blood to cleanse us from all our sins. Thou hast set us in wondrous difficulties, Thou hast smitten our tower and thrown it down, and only the foundation thereof remains; Thou hast smitten the choicest apple-tree in the garden; Thou hast taken away the one ewe lamb that was bleating for Thee on the hills, not knowing what it was bleating for. But if Thou hast shown us great and sore trouble Thou wilt surely revive us again; for the third day is Thine, and the seventh, and the day of sudden coming, and the

morning of startling vision. So we lay ourselves down on Thy bosom, Thou Son of God, and rest there until we hear Thy voice, Thy next command, Thy completing benediction. We give one another into the keeping of the hand of God ; except the Lord keep the city the watchman watcheth it but in vain ; the Lord keep us, keep our mouth, our lips, the outgoing of our mind and our heart, and the secret doors of the temple of our manhood, lest the enemy cunningly and silently approach, and overthrow the lifehouse whilst we are slumbering. Some are sad of heart ; Thou dost meet them in Thine house with great delight, and Thou bringest with Thee balm from the unseen and far-off Gilead. Some are tired of life ; it is a dream that has darkened into nightmare, it is an expectation that falls short of a hope ; it is a blighted ambition, and a dead trust. Is there no reviving with the Lord ? is He, who made the heavens and the earth, tired ? and has He gone back from us in exhaustion and fatigue ? Blessed be God, Thou art still near us, Jesus still lives and prays for us ; we will bring our little crosses and lean them against the infinite Cross of His unspeakable grief. Amen.

XXXVIII.

UNREPORTED INTERVIEWS.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 16TH, 1899.

"When they were alone, He expounded all things to His disciples."

—MARK iv. 34.



THESE were unreported interviews ; these were secret conferences. We do not speak our best things in the public air ; our whispers are costlier than our thunder ; they may have more life in them, more tenderness, more poetry.

We cannot report what we have heard, except in some poor dull way of words. That is hardly a report at all. To hear any man tell over what he has heard you say, that is punishment ! He may speak your very words, and leave out your soul ; with the best intention, he may report the interview upside down. Communications are not in words, except in some rough, commercial, and debtor-and-

creditor way. Communications are in the breathing, in the looking, in the touching, in the invisible and the inaudible. You say you have it in black and white. That is impossible; that is the fundamental error of some minds—to imagine that they can have anything worth keeping in black and white, in a cast-iron form, in a mechanical environment. It was not a word, it was a tone that smote you; not a photograph, but a look that held you entranced in a most willing, consenting captivity.

Jesus Christ had two speeches. The one to the great multitude. For them He had toys and stories and miracles and parables; He knew them well, He knew precisely what was adapted to their receptive power and their then state of intellectual culture. He always took out with Him toys enough to amuse and interest and haply instruct the gaping mob. To hear Jesus you must wait until He comes into the house; let Him read the Scriptures to you when your number is but small. His greatest tones are in the minor key; the way in which He finds the heart is a way of His own; never man spake like this Man. We are thankful for His great public utterances; without them we could not live; they constitute what is at least the framework and apparatus of His redeeming Gospel and His eternal kingdom; but His whisper was His eloquence. When we were most hushed we were most applauding. There is an applause of tears, there is a cheering of the radiant face, the radiant dumbness. Have we ever been closeted with Christ? Have we taken our four gospels and apostolic epistles, and asked Jesus Christ to read them to us just as He always meant them to be read? Have we taken to Him civilisation, history, providence, the daily story of grief or joy, of loss or gain, and asked Him to read them to us in the right tone? Have we had secret interviews with Christ? Do we live in solitude? or in the thronged park, amid the rattle of wheels and the high-stepping horses? The only man who can interpret Christ is Christ Himself. Surely a man can interpret his own letter better than any other man can interpret it for him; for he has expressed the sincere desire of his heart. Jesus Christ is still accessible; Jesus Christ is still a

house-to-house minister ; He ought to be a member of every household, He ought to have a chair at every table, He ought to be welcomed on every occasion. Think of Jesus in the house, close at hand, a friend, a brother, a guest, who speaks the blessing and thus multiplies the feast.

I live with Christ, and He has taught me that there are two ways of reading everything. Sometimes I have thought my Lord partly amused at the greatness of us when we were really least. I am not quite literally sure, but I think I have sometimes seen the outline of a smile upon His face as He has watched the development of what we call our civilisation. He has spoken very frankly to me upon this matter, He has told me that civilisation must be very carefully watched, or it will become our ruin ; He says that civilisation unsanctified is a breach of the very first commandment of the decalogue.

My Lord, said I, we are proud of our civilisation, we thought it Thine. It was then I thought I saw the ghost of a smile flit over the fairest of faces, when He said, It may be mine, or it may not ; I have forbidden you in the decalogue to make to yourselves any graven image, and, behold, you have taken my gold and stamped it with the faces of your kings ; I have looked into your houses, and found that they were no better in some instances than graven and molten images before which you bowed down and said, as you bowed before the idols' feet, Behold great Babylon which I have builded ! We may have made civilisation atheistic. Civilisation in the higher sense is in the purpose of God, and He is leading all things towards the accomplishment of that purpose ; God is the God of order and civilisation and the highest intellectual life and energy ; God is the Father of all beauty and loveliness and music, and He wishes us to have all these things, and more and more if we hold them as His gifts and use them as His trustees. Never let your civilisation be bigger than your humanity ; always let the worker be greater than his work ; let the cabinet-maker be more in quality than any chair he ever put together and sold for mean silver. We are proud of our civilisation, and Jesus Christ says, Do not be proud of it in any sense that

excludes its higher symbolism ; the tree is nothing, and the fruit is nothing, and the summer that warms them into fulness of expression is nothing, when stripped of symbolism, typology, the indication of the higher meaning, the right tree, the right fruit, the eternal summer.

I have said to Jesus Christ, speaking as a minister to my instructing and inspiring Lord, This is my great difficulty, Thou sweet Jesus, that I have to preach faith, and, taking the people in their multitudinousness, they do not know what faith is ; they think it is something metaphysical or theological, or something that has to do some way or other with churches, and they reject my poor message. And He said to me, It is indeed unspeakably curious and psychologically most interesting, if it were not morally painful and disastrous, to watch the ways of people about faith ; for people who will not be saved by faith are willing to be lost by fear ; it is most paradoxical, said He ; now fear is just as psychological and spiritual and metaphysical and inwardly inward as faith ; yet they take so kindly to fear, and look upon faith as some ghost of the Church. I thank Thee, Lord, for that illuminating word. It is even so. Fear destroys strength, fear ruins men, fear clouds the imagination, fear enfeebles the will, fear eats out the soul ; and men are willing that it should be so, and they make a kind of boast of their fear ; but when I speak to them of their faith, they think it is Sunday and that I am preaching. My Lord, help me ! for this ministry is an ineffable burden and sadness.

Then said I to Jesus, The people believe in what they can see. Nay, said my Lord, that they do not, poor minister of mine. But, said I, they say that seeing is believing. Then quoth my Lord, It is quite right, but no man sees ; the eyes were not given that men might see, but that they might look ; body cannot see soul, therefore how can eyes, which are body, see thoughts, which are spirit ? They have a theory of adaptation amongst themselves, these poor half-civilised creatures who boast of their civilisation, that one instrument is adapted to one thing, and another instrument is adapted to another thing, and yet they think that the eyes of the body can see the

things which belong to the soul. *That* is their fatal fallacy; over that stumbling-block they will drop into hell. Oh! said He, after a moment's interval, that I had made men without eyes! for then their souls might have had fair play, and their thoughts might have been optical instruments by the use of which they could have penetrated into the inwardness and the metaphysic of the kingdom of God. Lord, said I, canst Thou—now that we are in the house together and the door is shut—canst Thou speak to me about all these fluttering things, stars and comets and worlds, and forests and seas; these things look as if they were realities. No, no! said He, poor child of mine and preacher, thou art looking at things from the wrong end and in the wrong light—thou, a pulpit man! Lord, teach me! And He taught me, saying, The things that are seen are not the real things; what thou canst see is all outside, symbolic, intermediate, perishable; the real things never can be seen; they can be prayed for, aspired after, and deeply thought about, until the soul becomes transfigured into the image of the invisible: what thou seest is the unreal; thy palace is a decorated grave; thy grave, if rightly read, may be a postern-gate opening into the King's gardens. Then all things became new to me, and I longed to tell the people what I had heard, because if they could have heard Jesus as I heard Him, and if they could see things as I now see them, all the world would be Christian—the earth an altar, the air a living and acceptable incense. Jesus Christ, however, pities us because we are still in the body, surrounded, limited, bewildered, blinded; our eyes are holden that we should not see; we are to be trained by the Holy Ghost into a deep and right and final interpretation of the mystery of God. There are people who believe in the body because they can see it; Jesus almost smiles when He hears such men talk such infantile talk. The men to whom reference is made say there can be no doubt about the body, and Jesus answers, That is the only thing that may be doubted; the body is ever changing, always casting off its yesterdays, continually struggling into a new carcase, always urging it towards a nobler manhood, when it is under right control. The only real thing, the Lord continuing said, is the

soul; that never dies; you will never see each other in the body again, but you will not want to see each other in the body when you step over the last black river and see the meaning of things; you will no more want to recover the old body than to recover the clothes you wore in infancy; you have shed them off, forgotten them; now you enter into a higher fellowship, a broader, deeper, more lasting life. We believe in the resurrection of the dead; the resurrection of the body is another thing altogether: but even that may rise again in your tenderest imaginings, in your deepest love. The only thing that God has promised to me just now is re-vision, reunion, larger fellowship, wedding in a new sense—wedding as the angels understand it. Enough!

These expositions of mystery and sorrow the Lord gave to us when we were alone, walking up the hills, sauntering in the valley, hesitating by the river-side, or when sleep draws its curtains round the tired head, and the ministering Lord can speak more closely to the soul because the body is otherwise and meanly engaged.

Then said I to my Lord when we were alone, There are so many churches. No, said He, no, there is only one Church. That one word was a deliverance, a revelation, a new beginning in the higher thought. They say, Lord, that this system is right and that system is wrong. No; they are both right. The Congregationalist tells me that his idea of the Church is right because it is self-governed. So, said my Lord, are all my other churches. The Congregationalist amuses himself with that annual mistake. It is only the unit that is changed. Congregationalism has its little unit, the individual church; Presbyterianism has its larger unit, all the churches of its order; Episcopalianism is as truly self-governed as is Congregationalism: it will not allow some other church to interfere in its affairs, as it calls its particular business. It is only the unit that is different. The Congregationalist is in danger of becoming rather narrow-minded, it may be, and self-idolatrous; he thinks that when he has got his little crowd of men of a certain quality in a little corner that that is the Church of Christ. So it is, if the spirit is

right, and if I myself, the Redeemer of the Church, be present in the midst of that company. But there is a larger unit of all the churches that think the same, and they are as self-governed as any little individual church may be that lives by begging and thinks it respectable to avoid starvation. My son, said my Lord to me, keep thine heart up ; the bigger centuries are coming, the larger definitions are at hand ; I will sweep all these little dust-heaps out of the way. The Lord will suddenly come to His temple ! Faith, hope, charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity. Knowledge vanished away, ashamed of its own ignorance ; prophecy, thrown down its horoscope, for it says, The Lord is at hand, and in His eyes all things shine as visions that men can read ; but charity abides, eternal love, great, sympathising, brotherly, redeeming love. Sectarianism, where is it ? Dead ! Who wrote its epitaph ? It has none.

So Jesus takes us one by one, according to our gift and function, and talks to us alone. What lovely, tender, inspiring talks we may have with our Lord ! We come out of them filled with His own inspiration, and enriched with His own patience and forbearance. We, being young, inexperienced, and foolish, want to have everything settled to-morrow. Jesus says, It takes a long time to make a rock ; I have been a million ages in making this little pebble at the bottom of the stream, and thinkest thou that a man can be made in no time ? If it required a million ages to make half-a-dozen smooth pebbles, how long will it take to make a redeemed and sanctified Church ? Be patient, take larger views of things ; the whole process is going on ; there are firstborn sons in knowledge, as well as in nature ; firstborn sons in prophecy and revelation and song, as well as in estates and titles and inheritances ; the whole mystery was settled from the beginning of the creation, and long before the creation was in existence. All things are primordially in God ; out of God they come, and God's will must be done on earth as in heaven, but day by day, five thousand more years, fifty thousand more risings of the sun, a million more revolutions of this planet or of that. But all the revolutions, all the silent dancing of the planets mean final music, beauty, rest.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, wilt Thou send a plentiful rain upon Thine inheritance, and make souls that are athirst rejoice because of great gladness. Thou hast the key of the rain; the river is Thine, and it is full of water; every drop Thou dost count, every shower Thou alone dost give. Thou dost look upon the earth, and satisfy its thirst abundantly; Thou baptizest the meads and the flowers and the great acres of corn, that there may be food for man and beast, and that Thy providence may be vindicated in annual season. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness! For this thirst we pray, the keener thirst, the inner thirst: the Lord hear us when we ask that we may be satisfied out of the river that flows by His own throne. None can quench the thirst of man but Thyself; Thou hast made man in Thine image and likeness, and none may trifle with him and mock him. Thou art the God and Father of us all; Thou knowest our whole nature, our pain, our need, our sin, our helplessness, and Thou hast made ample provision to meet us at every point of our life. We will not go after other gods, no idol shall dwell in our house; our whole life shall be the temple of the living God, and He shall dwell with us. We thank Thee for these gracious decisions and for these lofty aspirations; for they also come forth from the Lord of Hosts, excellent in counsel and wondrous in working. We bless Thee for the queenliest of the days, the day that makes all other days quiet, calm, and gives unto every other day a golden value. May we be in the spirit on the Lord's day, may our hearts burn with a great glow, and shout because they must praise the Lord. Thou hast done great things for us, whereof we are glad; and our gladness cannot be dumb, it must utter itself loudly and sweetly, and keep in accord with all the other voices that bless Thy goodness and Thy love. It is at once our joy and our terror to know that Thine eye sees everything in our life; there is nothing hidden from the fire of Thine eye; Thou dost pierce us through and through. Whilst we tremble before this vision we also rejoice in it, because if there is anything in us on which Thy smile can alight Thy smile will not be withheld, and because everything that is good in us is as a flower from Thine own garden and planted in our hearts by Thine own hand. Some are in great joy because Thou hast caused a light to shine into their house, and they are full of gladness because they have seen Thy presence with the vision of their love; Thou hast redeemed

them in distress, their extremity has been to Thee an opportunity, Thou hast made Thy servants and handmaidens glad with surprises of grace ; they bring to-day their thankoffering of love and praise ; Thou wilt deign to accept it, for the Lord's name is love and His attitude is one of condescension. Others are in great trouble ; all Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over them ; they do not know why they should be thrown down into the trough of the sea and that the waves should threaten to swallow them up. Some are concealing disease ; others are carrying sin unconfessed, though not unrepented. Others have a wound in their heart which they will not and dare not show to other eyes ; from day to day they say, A wounded spirit who can bear ? Others are all in youth and light and energy and hope and active dream ; behold, they see Thee in every colour, hear Thee in every breeze, and they are not afraid of the thunder, because it is the tabernacle of God. Seeing that we represent so much experience and so much variety and diversity, to whom can we come but to the God who made us all ? and by whom can we come but by the Son who died for us all ? He gave us our hope ; He is our peace ; He hath made atonement, He is the daysman who can lay His hand upon God and upon the sinner and can make reconciliation with His own blood. Through His Cross we come ; at His Cross we lie in hopeful prostration. No man ever died whose arms were thrown around the Cross. Amen.

XXXIX.

DWELL AMONG YOUR OWN.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 23RD, 1899.

"And she answered, I dwell among mine own people."—2 KINGS iv. 13.



THE whole incident is full of idyllic beauty, and is also vital with modern suggestion and application. "And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman ; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread.

And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick; and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee?—"I do not like to take such hospitality for nothing, I must make some recognition, what is the most acceptable form in which this recognition can express itself?" "Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king?" how would that do? "Or to the captain of the host?"—one of the most distinguished men; he has gifts to give and promotions to confer. What about the king or the captain? "And she answered, I dwell among mine own people"—let me alone, I want to speak my mother tongue; I know my customary environment, and I do not want to break through it or reconstruct it in any way; I am quite contented and happy. A woman beyond patronage; a soul not to be bribed, even if bribery were intended, which it was not in this case. Said the woman in effect: I am quite content, I do not want the king's notice, the captain of the host can do nothing for me; I have my husband, my house, my daily task, I am well content; if I were elsewhere I should feel as if I were a stranger: I would rather be just where I am. If this woman's spirit should take hold of us the most precious blessings would immediately and permanently be realised by every soul. It is vanity that disturbs the world; it is illegitimate, unnatural ambition that troubles and divides and torments lives that might otherwise be placid and content. A man is not always able to pass from one environment to another, and to retain the full use of his faculties. He who is really of consequence in one place would be of no consequence in another: the same man, but not the same environment.

It is so socially. If you allow the man to remain

upon his native heath; if you allow him to pursue his honest, quiet, healthful occupation of ploughing the land which he owns or rents; the man is quite content, he feels that he is in his right place. If you took that same man and planted him down in Park Lane, in Broadway, in the chief streets of the capitals of Europe and other countries, he would want to be back to the old plough, the old field, the old stacks of corn. He was then equal to the occasion, but he is not equal to the other occasion that has been forced upon him; in the depths of his heart he cries, Let me dwell among mine own people: oh for a day at home! in the old pastures, stroking the old cattle. The man is quite right. Disturbance of environment is loss of power and loss of peace and loss of self-respect.

It is so educationally. A man may be well informed and what is popularly called well read, and yet not be an educated man, and not be qualified to take any part in educated society. The very first time he opens his mouth the people know that he may be a well-filled sack, but not a man of education. He has information, facts in piles; he is like a well-filled grate, full of coal and paper and wood, but lacking the spark that makes the poetry and that fills the house with pictures. He will be the first to cry out when he is forced into new conditions, Oh that I could dwell among mine own people! I am but a well-informed artisan, my soul has not been bathed in rivers of knowledge and wisdom; I only know things from the outside, I have not that peculiar insight or prevision which sees the whole figure immediately in front of me, the background behind, the sky above, the darting, flashing lights that create all the mystery and poetry of colour: let me alone; I can then talk with my own comrades; they think I am quite a well-read man; in my soul I am not; I have read the opinions of other men, but I have not entered into the mystery of the higher communion with the spirits of light and blessedness. Much better that a man should know exactly what he is, what he can do, and what place he can adequately occupy.

Do not read the text in any spirit of narrow-

mindfulness or sectarianism, saying, I never go beyond my own house, I never inquire into the opinions or the sentiments of other people. That is not the spirit of the text when it is properly interpreted. You have a home, but you also have a neighbour; you have a house, but that does not prevent you accepting the hospitality of those of your own class. Do not therefore read sectarianism or bigotry into the text, but take it in its broad, deep, common-sense applications, and you will have rest, content, strength, and live the life of gracious and co-operative independence. How restless is the man who thinks he could be better and do better if he were only some ten storeys higher in the great house! How divided is the strength of the man who always wants to add another storey to his dwelling-place, another field to his estate; how mischievous is the influence which tells a man that if he could only be in some other place he would be the man of the day, the foremost man, the coming man,—nay, the man come and crowned.

It is so in commerce. You think that if you had only another kind of stool to sit on it would be equal to a throne; but, you say, who can sit on this tripod, this three-legged stool? if I had an easy chair covered with morocco my customers would see at once that I am a prince in the camp, or a king, and they would respect me as such; after all, it is morocco that creates the occasion! Foolish man, and self-disappointing man! If he could say, I am now in a position which by the providence of God I can fill; if enlargement comes to me I shall be glad to welcome it, but it must come in a legitimate way; he that is industrious or diligent in his own business shall stand before kings; I will not trouble my mind about standing before kings, but I will be down to my business early in the morning and stay at it late at night, and I will always be on the spot, and no chance shall pass by me; I shall not be talking about other things, and neglecting the importunity of the commercial age; if the kings come along and ask me to come out and be saluted by them, well, I shall be on the ground, but what I have to do is to dwell in my own position, to do my immediate duty, to occupy well the talents

I have; and as for the kings, I shall have as much of them as is good for me. It is an infinite mischief for a man to get it into his head that he ought to be somebody else; he loses his own power; he is not really what he might be and what God intended him to be; he is a wavering and double-minded man, and he can receive nothing of the Lord and he can receive nothing of men; for he is here and he is there, and he is nowhere. When shall we cultivate calmly, educationally, domestically, religiously, a steady, deep, quiet, urgent, loving life? Shall we in the broadest and most generous sense dwell among our own and be their ornament as they are our complement?

We are all tempted to think that if we were somewhere else we would be somebody. What we are does not satisfy us; it is well enough to be going on with, but we want another kind of thing, and to be somewhere else; and the devil tells us that a man of our attainments and faculties ought to be somewhere else. The old liar! he was a liar and a murderer from the beginning, and he has never been able to change his certificate. There are some persons who think that they could be very great people if they were only somewhere else. That is what they want. If it was only round the corner, or in the next street; if they could only come out more publicly and definitely! It is so life-wasting. It is one of my very brief and occasional amusements to see the bird take up the snail in its shell and drop it on a hard brick, and then take the snail out of the shell. So many people want to come out of their shell! The devil wants them to do so; and he takes them up, and dashes them against hard stones, and drinks up their poor little soul, and leaves the empty shell in a thousand pieces little. Why not be happy at home? why not make the best of the situation? Why not say, The environment is very small and very poor, but it is the very best thing that I can do at present, and I will make the best of my opportunities and be cheerful, and I shall wait and watch and pray, and when God wants me elsewhere He will send for me; meanwhile, I dwell among mine own people.

Some persons think that they confer a great honour, for example, upon Dissenters by remaining with them. No! no man can confer an honour upon Dissent; it is the life of the world, it is the guarantee of progress. Some persons posture as if they were martyrs: if they were not surrounded as they are they might sometimes be invited to a garden party at the vicarage. Oh what I lose, one of such people may say, by being a Dissenter! they do not ask me to a tennis party or to a bowling party or to a cycling club just because I belong to that little conventicle. No! there are no "little conventicles"; they are testimonies, witnesses, revelations of the higher truth; and if you want to go to a garden party elsewhere, go; I dwell among mine own people. Anybody that would not admit me because I have convictions I am quite willing to dispense with; I could do better without such patronage than with it. Where I go my convictions must go; I have not a movable conscience that I can leave behind me, and laugh the fool's laugh on some other ground.

What a temptation to any man it is to be told that a man of his talents and powers might be the manager of the business! The moment that idea gets into a man's mind he is ruined. When a man says, Of course I know well what my capacity is; I know that if I had gone aside from the pulpit and gone to the bar, I might now have been receiving my thousands a year. If you were really called to the pulpit you make no sacrifice for Christ's sake by abiding in it. I owe all I am and have to Christ's grace and Christ's ministry. I have lost nothing by it; I have gained everything. I thank God I have never received the temptation that if I would only turn talents of such and such a kind in other directions I might be a figure in the capital and have a very large fruit garden. Get thee behind me! avaunt! out, foul fiend! it is a lie, and I know it. Resist the devil, and he will flee from thee. There is the temptation, and we had better recognise it, and expect the tempter to come along that line. He says to you, You living in a little place like this! a man of your

powers! if you came to London, why I can almost promise you, and do it in writing, that in less than twelve months you will have London at your feet; yet here you are wasting your power preaching to three or four dozen poor yokels who never read anything beyond the serial literature of the day; why, yours is a metropolitan style; if you were to come to London, London only could hold the people that would wait upon your ministry. A man likes to be told that; he knows it is exaggeration, and he says so, "but at the same time——" Now the mischief has begun! the moment the man said, "But at the same time," he began the reasoning that ends in perdition. He should have said, I am Christ's servant; I put myself wholly into the hands of Christ; if I have to labour in this little village I dwell among mine own people; they are kind-hearted people, simple-minded, sincere, generous to a fault; they make everything of me that mortal man can make of a minister; when Jesus Christ wants me to go and overwhelm London by the splendour of my genius and the energy of my passion, He will drop me an indication to that effect: meanwhile, I dwell among mine own people; I stand here, and I am happy in their friendship and rich in their love. Young minister, take that lesson; remember it when I am not here to give it. He who is faithful over a few things shall be made ruler over many things, and it is neither in your power nor in mine to confer distinction or lustre on the Christian pulpit; by its message, its redeeming gospel, its grand, revealing, eternal kingdom, it looks down upon us, and accepts us only as we are willing to accept its spirit.

You would like to get back to the old village after being lost in London for some two years and a half. But the old village has forgotten you, because you forgot the old village. You did not leave in the right spirit; you laboured under the influence of a contemptuous feeling; you thought you were so much superior to your poor few people. Sir, you were not! I care not how few or how poor the people, if the Spirit of Christ is in them they are worthy of any genius that

you and I may have been mistakenly entrusted with.

Now there is nothing narrow or little in Christ's conception of life. He does not want to make us hermits or dissatisfied hearts, known by what name soever. Christians must remain amongst Christians. You do not know how good the very meanest Christian is until you get into the society of men who have no God, no reverence, no religious aspiration. There is blasphemy in their wink, there is hell in their hot breath; they are incarnate lust, embodied selfishness or sordidness that can never do you good. Do not venture beyond the Christian circle; understanding by the Christian circle all that is holy, beautiful, benevolent, philanthropic, and redeeming. You need not leave Christ if you want great subjects of contemplation and study. Christianity holds in its keeping the greatest themes on which the greatest intellects can dwell. Nor need you leave Christian society if you want to be wealthy with the true riches. The true riches consist of thought, ideas, broad conceptions, brilliant outlooks, consciousness of the nearness and helpfulness of the spiritual world. He who has these things has the true wealth, and moth and rust are shut out from the house in which such treasures are preserved. You need not leave Christ if you want to enjoy the most exalted and the most exalting communion. We are come to the spirits of just men made perfect. All history in its saintliest moods and influences is at our service. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Abraham is ours, and Samuel, and David, and the man of visions, and the man whose soul's ear can catch the music of the spheres. There is nothing little, tawdry, deteriorating, and bemeaning and belittling in the Christian life. If some men have made it so, blame the men, not the idea. Jesus Christ intends us to have lofty conceptions, brilliant outlooks, magnificent spheres of service, and to enjoy opportunities for doing good on the largest possible scale. When the dear Lord says to one and to another, Will ye also go away? our answer is, Go away? to whom shall we go? Ay, verily, to whom shall we go? To cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water; to conjurers and necromancers and theorists; to the

fool who laughs with me to-day, and will laugh at me to-morrow? To whom shall we go, sweet Lord, to whom? What other man is there? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

I accept the teaching of the text; my vanity, my self-importance is quenched; I am set back in my own environment, great or small; I am told to make the best of my surroundings, and I accept the will of God. This should be the outcome of all such meditations as ours to-day. One of the most capable pastors I have ever known was a man who never had a hundred people in his congregation, but he thought there was no such congregation in the world. That was his power. He did not take me aside and say, You see how I am surrounded by these poor creatures; you can see for yourself that they are persons of a very inferior quality, and I necessarily, as a man of some reading and culture, feel a little dissatisfied with this surrounding; if there is anything in London that you can introduce me to I feel that I should now like a little change. Never! They were "my people," true people, godly, excellent people; every one of them doing the best he could for Christ's cause. And he never wanted to be introduced to a pastorate in the London that in two days would have forgotten him.

PRAYER.

O LORD, Thou art not far from any one of us. We can whisper to Thee in the depths of our hearts ; Thou dost incline Thine ear and hear us ; Thou dost stoop to gather us to Thy breast. We have heard of Thee as the great Shepherd, having sheep in this fold and in that fold, and Thou knowest where all Thy flock is, whether among the rocks or in the green pastures, whether in the daylight or whether in the darkness seven-fold. Thou dost cause every one of Thy flock to pass under the rod that Thou mayest know whether all Thy followers are at home ; Thou dost count them one by one, not laying the rod upon them in chastisement, but in indication that Thou dost notice every one that comes home. May we thus pass under Thy rod, not to be smitten, but to be counted and to be enrolled as members of the great flock under the great Shepherd. We have always been under the eyes of Thy love, we have like sheep gone astray and turned every one to his own way, but Thou hast come after us all. Thou hast died for us all, and now we have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, and we have forgotten our wandering and all its sore distress. Deliver us from the gloom of the past, from the great weight of guilty memory ; enable us to look upward to the Cross and forward to the glory, and to think less of our sins than of Thy redemption. It is in the name of Jesus we now come before Thee ; He taught us how to pray, He built the altar, He inclined His ear, He offered the great answer to our heart's supplications ; we therefore pray in the name of Jesus, and ask Thee to answer us in the power of His grace. We would bring Thee our little song, some flower from the summer garden of our gratitude ; for Thou hast done great things for us, and art doing them day by day, so that our whole life is a miracle of surprise and deliverance. We will not be dumb in the courts of the Lord ; each man has his own story of deliverance and release to tell ; the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and under the sunniest face there lies a bruised heart. Thou knowest our distress, our loneliness ; Thou knowest how long the time is, and how heavy are the slow-passing hours. Some of us are watching by the sick bed in hope, in fear ; in fear, in hope ; now this, now that ; now a great light, and now a great gloom ; and we hasten

away into privacy lest we hurt the sufferer by our tears. And some are in great joy, for all the heaven is blue ; when the night-time comes the stars overspread it with light ; they are full of joy and gladness, so full of gladness that is holy that they would give a portion to him that has none, and seek out the case that is far off, and help to include some other life in their great festival of love. And some are weary of the world, and dare not leave it ; longing for suicide, but may not commit it ; praying for death, but death fleeth from them : for life is a weariness, every day a bitter disappointment, every summer a mockery of hope. And others are simple-minded, sincerely waiting for the Lord, saying, Not my will, but Thine, be done ; quite sure that the Lord is at hand, and sure that the Lord is at hand as the great apostles were ; for the Lord was just there, a figure in the light, an outline in the noonday, an attitude in the sun ; always coming, always nearly come, always sending a promise, and always assuring a fulfilment. And some are wondering about the other hearts that are not in this assembly, the far-away hearts, those who could not afford to come because the distance was long, the voyage tedious, and some who dare not leave lest the little one should die or the oldest friend should pass away. Some are wondering about the boy that has not written so long, they wonder if aught has happened, and their hearts are more there than here, and would not be here at all were it other than the house of God. Now that Thou knowest our condition, and that our hearts and hands are spread out unto Thee in posture of expectation, now that we are gathered at the Cross, what wait we for but some answer that will lighten the burden, cheer the sadness, and give hope to desolation that dare hardly open its eyes ?

The Lord hear us and comfort us and be with us on our way from Bethel to Jericho, and to the further city, and to the place where the chariot will come down, and the angels will bid us take our seats, and rise. Amen.

XL.

VICTORIES, NOT VICTORS.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 30TH, 1899.

"Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place."

—2 COR. ii. 14.



HIS is a difficult text to remember; let us beat it out into more words, if haply in the multiplication of words we may here and there catch something of the idea. "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ." We never go to any city but the magistrates and the leaders of that city fall down before us in a kind of social homage; they are delighted to see us; they say, These are men of fame, this is a special event, an historical opportunity, and all the people turn out of all the houses to shout Huzza! It is a wonderful ministry to which we are called; every rival is put down, no competition can live when we present ourselves; we have only to speak, and the waters fall to obedience and silence, and all the social atmosphere is a blessing. You now begin to see something of the meaning of the apostle's exclamation. I hope you do not, for the apostle said nothing of the kind; he hardly spoke of himself or of his brother apostles at all. The text would read just the contrary way. "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph"—nothing of the kind; that would be a poor speech, altogether unworthy of apostolic dignity and sanctification. This is not egotism, this is worship; this is not self-exaltation, this is falling down before Christ and hailing Him Lord of all. The apostle never said, See how great a victor I am; if I go out to hunt I bring back with me prey of all sorts; never, not even Nimrod, stood mightier hunter than I am. That is not the apostolic tone; it is the tone of folly, of self-

ignorance, and of guilty ambition. The text has been read thus: "But thanks be unto God, which always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest through us the savour of His knowledge in every place." What was the first picture like? It was like a number of boasting men all gathered together and praising one another as persons who drew upon themselves the recognition and the applause of every society into which they entered. What is the second and true picture? That all these men have been arrested, converted, blessed by Jesus Christ, and He as conqueror points to them and says, Behold the men I have taken at the spearpoint. So we are not victors, but victories; not little greatnesses that have strutted our hour of vanity upon the stage, but we are the prey of Christ, the consenting and happy victims of His spear; He wounded us that He might make us immortal in His own blessedness.

This, then, is a beautiful picture. The subject ought to be treated pictorially. We should see a great king with a great procession of chariots behind him, and those chariots full of saved men, and the Captain of their salvation at the head pointing to these men as proofs of the reality and energy and beneficence of His redeeming and saving grace. Let the heart keep the picture vividly before its eyes: Christ at the head, miles of chariots, all golden, all filled with living hymns, all wounded men, but wounded to their own salvation; and as they come along they say, We have been taken by Christ at the spearpoint; if you want to know what Christ can do, read the record of our experience. Christ says in effect, If you would know what my Gospel can do with men, look at all these consenting and grateful arrests of mine, and you will understand the purpose of the redeeming grace of heaven. So egotism is dead; it is the Lord that is magnified, and not the apostle or preacher or flaming evangelist. Stand back! it is the Lord's trophy; it is the Lord's day; we will rejoice and be glad.

This reading of the text does two things: first, it puts Christ in His right position, and, secondly, it puts Christians in their right position, and not Christians only, but Christian apostles and martyrs, the leaders

and heads of the visible Church upon earth, appointed by Christ, clothed by Him with some mantle which is the truest honour of the soul. Christ is put in His right position by being put at the head of the great procession. Who is this that cometh up from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah, this that is red in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? And who are these that follow Him, and sing as they follow? It is the army of the saved, it is the caravan of the blessed, it is the host on every member of which is sprinkled the saving blood, and by these grand trophies of His grace Christ spreads the news of His kingdom over all the waiting earth.

It would be interesting to look at one or two of these men and to ask one or two questions about them. They all seem to be distinguished men; the Lord has conquered in high places. May we interrupt the caravan for a moment and ask who are these marked with red blood, sealed with a seal, and claimed by a mighty King? Yes, we may interrogate the whole of them. Take two or three typical instances, and they will do for the rest, as explaining the idea and putting it in pictorial form and colour.

Who is this first man following immediately after Christ? His name is Paul. Was that always his name? No; at first he was called Saul. A man of any family or standing, any pedigree? can he produce any documents to establish his identity as belonging to the house of history and antiquity? He can; he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as regarding the law, a man blameless; a person of great intellectual capacity, keen-sighted; and as for will, no fortress of rock could keep him back. He hated the Christian religion, he hated Christ; he thought he was doing God service by opposing the name and claim of Christ; and he went out to seek those who prayed in the name of Christ, that he might exterminate them. A blameless man, as regards the law. How comes he in this chariot? and so near the Captain of the whole host? He is the joyful, grateful prisoner of Christ. Does he want to be in that chariot? He does, or nothing could keep him there. He calls himself the slave of the Lord

Jesus—slave in its poetic sense, slave as involving ownership and consent and obedience and invincible attachment to the house of the King. What has Christ to say about this man? He has this to say, namely: Self-righteousness is conquerable by grace. There is the proof. Do not go into any argument of words; one word fights another; let the wordy contest go on: there is the man. Paul has taken up all his pedigrees, genealogies, hereditary rights and claims, and, gathering them up into one little bundle, he has deliberately thrust the whole into the very hottest centre of the fire, and says, Things that I counted gain to me I count but loss; yea, I count all things but loss, refuse, *σκυβαλα*, nothing worth. It would take some great argument to convince this man, it took Christ Himself, the embodied grace of God; it was that great force that came into conflict with him at the gate of Damascus, and there with a white flame as a sword the Lord Jesus smote this man, and points to him to-day and for ever as an illustration of what the grace of God can do, when man does not obstinately and to his own ruin resist the pleading and sweet entreaty of the Spirit. The most self-righteous man amongst us may be conquered by the grace of Christ. Surely the conquest of self-righteousness is the supreme miracle of the Cross. Man loves his own miserable piety; man loves to have a righteousness that he can measure and lay his hand upon and estimate and appreciate in plain figures; a morality that can be plainly seen by plainest folks. To cast away that righteousness and take upon the soul and into the soul a spiritual righteousness, with new motives, new purposes, new aspirations, and new realisations of destiny—never! Yes, now! There's the conflict, and Christ will win. We must get rid of our self-righteousness, we must cast ourselves upon the grace of God, we must fall down dead as it were at the foot of the Cross, and cry for the pity and for the healing grace of the Lord Jesus.

Who is that not far behind Paul? That is a very remarkable man; if you knew his history you would at once acknowledge that he is a remarkable man. That man is the dying thief. Jesus spake to him, got an entrance into his heart, told him that he need not

be a thief any longer. Only tell a man that he need not be a drunkard any more, nor a thief, nor a bad creature, and you instantly bring the morning of hope to shine upon the night of his despair. That is the dying thief; he said, "Lord, remember me!" He called Jesus "Lord"—more than Sir, more than a mere title of courtesy; this was not the time for playing off the tricks of gentlemanliness, this was an hour of agony, when the real man expressed himself in adequate terms. He called Jesus Lord, and recognised Jesus as the King of a kingdom, and recognised that Jesus Christ had power in more worlds than one. If the grace of God could get at that man's heart, why should it not get at mine, at yours? The man was half in hell; the man was swiftly sinking down the line that ends in the pit. We can be saved from going into it: Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. Do not go into some little miserable verbal argument, here is the man; he was taken at the spearpoint, and that spear has lost nothing of its strength or keenness; yield to that gracious thrust, and die that you may for ever live.

And there sits a man not far from him who uttered a prayer the world will need until its latest day. It was a short prayer, it was great in its brevity; it was a Bashan in an acorn, it was a great forest in a little seed. This man is known throughout all history as the publican who prayed side by side with the Pharisee. He said, "God be merciful unto me a sinner!" God was merciful to him; the man went down to his house justified. It is evident, therefore, that even self-contempt is conquerable. The man repudiates himself, dare not look heaven in the face, is afraid of the white stars by night, and he will hardly look at the earth, for it is rich with blooming and pure flowers; he knows not where to look: where can shame look and self-conviction? He looks within and sees the putridity of the sin of which he is guilty, and his lips move, saying, "God be merciful to me!" The prayer that always brings the key from the throne; the prayer which God never answered but in the affirmative and immediately in the affirmative; no time was lost, the prayer was hardly uttered until heaven's grand amen came down and

filled the air as with the presence of angels. Are we really filled with the spirit of self-contempt? I do not inquire whether we do in some moments cantingly describe ourselves under very contemptuous names; that may all be hypocrisy of the very meanest and cheapest sort; but do we in our soul's soul hold ourselves as before God in contempt? If so, here is the answer; not an answer in words, for words can be answered by words; here is the answer in life, in a living personality, in a definite and ascertainable character. It is by such miracles that Christ makes His way, the Conqueror, the King.

All these, some hearer may say, do not represent my case; I left my father and my mother, I am a mean wretch; I have not written to them except to beg for many a day; I dare not think about myself, I have murdered my father and mother; they used to sit up for me, thinking I would come home, and I never went; they used to trust messages to people in the hope that they would some day and somehow meet me and deliver the message of perpetual love; there is no man in that procession that represents me; I am not the publican, I am not the dying thief, I am not Saul of Tarsus; I am the prodigal son. Here he is, in the very next chariot, the prodigal son returned, and the Lord Jesus would not permit him to tell out the last tone of his prayer; the Lord Jesus saw what his heart was going to say, and stopped him, and said, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him. Was that not so, returned prodigal? And the answer comes ringingly forth, Yea, that was my case; I came home, and my father received me, and my mother became young again, and the house was a castle of sunshine, and the whole atmosphere became a very near and appreciable heaven. The argument to the living prodigal is this: If the grace of God could triumph over the prodigal son's obstinacy and selfishness, why may it not triumph over yours? Go home to-day, take the prayer of a guilty, self-condemning heart with you, tell your father and mother and other friends exactly how it was, keep nothing back, pour out the wretched tale, and get rid of it, or it will injure you like a hidden scorpion: out with it! When you have made

up your mind to this, the grace of God will come into your heart and fill it with gladness and with hope, and though you may never be able to forgive yourself, you have no business to think about yourself after the great transaction has been completed. When Christ's grace has spoken the word to you, you may say, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of which saved sinners I am chief. You do not go back to your villany, you go forward to your adoption and your sonship. Many men find it to be almost impossible to get rid of their old selves. What sanction is there in Scripture for keeping up the penance of self-reproach? Surely there comes a time when grace is utterly to destroy the memory of sin. If there is a struggle between sin and grace in the human heart, there must necessarily be a vivid memory of the unholy things which degraded and disgraced our past lives. But when the Gospel has been received in all its redeeming energy and uplifting music, all its holy grace and its tender sympathy, the memory of sin should be blotted out and the spirit of grace should fill the whole horizon of life and hope. Penitence is an act which in a sense may be completed and glorified; but grace continually comes into the heart day by day, and will come in until the whole soul is saturated with the love of God and with the spirit of holiness. In the degree in which that process is completed we may come to forget the very name of sin as one day we shall forget the name of sorrow and the name of sighing, for both sorrow and sighing shall flee away. I will not look continually and depressingly at my sins, I will look at the Cross where they were forgiven, and I will listen to the Saviour, who says, Go in peace,—a command He never could have given if He had intended me to lacerate my heart with self-reproach to the very end of my days.

We are, then, to be specimens of Christ's victorious grace. What an honour, what a responsibility, yet what a danger! lest we should be self-deceived and be but half-subdued. The argument of Christ is, Believe me for the work's sake; here is the man, the man is the best argument; personal character is the best defence; remember what the man was, what the man is, to what energy he ascribes the change. He

tells you it was the miracle of the grace of God; believe the man. Why should you be keeping outside God's gracious kingdom, chaffering with some fellow-disputant, neither of you being able to discuss the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven with any adequacy of intellectual force or spiritual fitness? why should you be asking hard questions in words? There is the man, the soul, the publican, the thief, the prodigal,—there! You have not to answer an argument in words, you have to destroy a logic in life, a grand syllogism in fact, in experience, in ascertainable consequence. Do not, I pray you, especially the young, be going and buying books that will puzzle you with long words and difficult arguments. Look at the instances you yourselves have known of the energy of the grace of Christ; know that Jesus Christ calls you to consider what victories He has already won. Whatever your case or mine may be, there is an analogy, a parallel, an almost identical instance in the record of Christ's victories. Read it, and say, If Christ could conquer that man, He can conquer me. Jesus of Nazareth, take me at the point of Thy victorious spear!

PRAVER.

THOU dost confound us with questions. We are utterly bewildered and stupefied by the inquiries which Thou dost put in thunder, we are afraid and scared and driven off. We cling to our own little tether, we can go but so short a way. We have lifted up our eyes and beheld, and, lo, we cannot count the stars; we have no names for them; we name a few, but our names exhaust themselves: what are these further ones, these brighter ones, the star-faces that look upon us from the infinitely glorious line? We are of yesterday, and know nothing. If Thou wouldst by Thy grace teach us that we know nothing, we shall begin to be wise. If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing as it is. We sit down self-rebuked, utterly humiliated; our breath is in our nostrils, and the grave opens its mouth and laughs at us from under our feet. The Lord keep us within our own lines; Thou hast fixed the bounds of our habitation: oh that Thou wouldst fix the bounds of our fancy, ambition, and speculation! then we should have time to work, and in service we should find all the revelation we need. Thou hast been very good to us; Thou hast given to us with both hands, and the left hand has been as the right, and Thy generosity sevenfold and beyond all our imagining. If any man has seen the white face of death, show him the radiant countenance of immortality; if any man thinks he has sounded all the depths of sorrow, teach him he has not yet begun to know it as compared with the infinite grief of the Son of God. We take our little crosses and set them up beside His great Cross, and we are ashamed of their meanness.

The Lord be with us, a beauteous morning, a spring day, a summer dawn, an autumnal benediction. Let the Lord hear us, and His attention will be an answer. We speak it at the Cross. The Lord will hear us when we kneel before that altar of blood and love. Amen.

XLI.

LIMITS.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 21ST, 1899.

"What canst thou do? . . . what canst thou know?"—JOB xi. 8.



THESE questions were put by an extraordinary contradiction of human manner. They were put by Zophar, a citizen of the fair Naamath—a lovely place, full of flowers: a place that the summer might have haunted, and have lingered until the last beam of light faded behind the hills. Yet this was one of the most rough-spoken men of his day; in this respect the environment and the man were mismatched. Zophar was an accuser, a man of rough tongue; he could not be civil until after he had been rude. He told Job that he, the wasted one, was "a man of lips," in the Hebrew tongue,—a word-chopper, a gabbler in the face of heaven's patience, and that Job knew nothing about his own case. The ideal and poetic Eliphaz had spoken, and Bildad—the sort of middleman that interprets poetry to prose, and makes the dull dog try to understand a word here and there—and Zophar comes up with the climax of brutality. There is a candour that is not lovely, there is an outspokenness that had better have choked itself before it began to speak. Yet every now and then—for we have called the man a self-contradiction—Zophar comes squarely down on the bedrock of fact and experience, and treats the whole deitic question with wonderful pith, setting it out in glittering generalisations and stunning Job as if by new proverbs.

This is illustrated by the text: It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? it is deeper than hell—man, hear me! why bruise thy knuckles on that door? this whole question is deeper than Hades, deeper than the grave,

deeper than the burning pits below the ocean; what canst thou know? It was a rough way of preaching, and yet not without its own grim grandeur. Zophar called Job back to beginnings, to realities, to limitations. Said he in effect, See thee, this is the length of thy tether; thou hast seen a dog straining his neck as if he would get beyond the length of his iron chain, and he could not do it, but he nearly choked himself in the process; be wise; this thing deitic, is higher than heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell what canst thou know? "Do," "know."—nearly all the verbs in one couplet.

Everywhere man, proud man, is set back, is stung with rebukes, is driven off from the front line as if it were already pre-engaged. Great man, so great that he speaks about—hear it!—the inferior animals! He has even taken some of the inferior animals under his protection; he has made refuges for them, and collected subscriptions for them, and called them dumb creatures. I have never met any dumb dogs or dumb lions or dumb fowls of the air; each had its crow, or its little utterance of smallest music. When men talk about the dumb animals, I wonder what they mean; when man, full six feet high, and knowing it, speaks about the inferior animals, he is at his worst. In one sense they are inferior, but in many other senses they are superior. Can you fly as high as the eagle? If the standard of comparison is flying, I think that man will have to occupy a very humble seat somewhere where it is impossible to see him. What can you do with the lion or the tiger? can you stand foul weather as he can? can you sleep in the jungle? And yet my lord talks about the inferior animals, and sometimes addresses Sunday-schools on that grim subject. The dog rebukes his master; the bloodhound says, Stop at home, proud man, and I will find the hidden, the self-concealed murderer; let me but catch one sniff of anything he ever wore, and I will hunt him to the death. And proud man buys him a kennel and a collar. Stop at home, and for the nonce be the inferior animal.

Explain it how you may, man is being continually

rebuked, reduced in magnitude, put in a very sober place. In some other respects we know how godlike he can be, how sweet in prayer, how tender in sympathy, how noble in charity; but always distinguish between the inferior and the superior, and understand, O man, that thou art tethered, and beyond thy chain thou canst not go. If you will know so much, you will begin to be wise. Why, we say this in poetry and literature, and science and preaching, and in everything else indeed; we speak of a man who knows exactly what he can do. Professor Huxley said that to keep within the range of your own ability is power; to try to get beyond it is weakness. If man could know but once now and then that he is not God, he might sometimes stumble on the eternal throne and begin to pray. It would seem as if God had placed man in an environment of rebuke. Man is snubbed on every hand. The hills rebuke his strength; futurity rebukes his insight; the sky mocks his stature; nature never visits his academy except to laugh at him. When man charges you to go into his academy, the great nature-academy—the rocks and trees and forests and rivers and seas—says, Come, behold the works of the Lord and the wonders of His hand. Man publishes a catalogue, God publishes the universe. Nature is very severe sometimes; when she is in a satiric mood there is no satire so acid and so biting as hers. Sometimes she looks upon a landscape which some man has painted; then her countenance is a sight; she looks upon the trees, and wonders where the poor creature got the idea from; she rejects his portraits, and will not buy his photographs. She stands alone—an original. So man is continually rebuked; he is continually hearing thundered into his ear, It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? Thou poor dog, sleep in thy kennel, and dream thyself into more bigness and wisdom.

I could show you some little pictures that would preach better on the text than I can ever hope to do or any other man. Let me show you one or two. I say to this man, On what business art thou bent to-day? He says, I am going to measure the sun. With what instruments? With this yard wand; I shall be

back when I have finished. I say, I am sure you will, but not until then, I hope. It is higher than heaven, man; what canst thou do with thy yard wand? Go home, stand behind thy village counter, and earn an honest loaf, but never attempt to measure the sun with a yard wand. Let us walk by the seaside; here is a man who seems to be very busy. May we ask you what you are doing? Certainly. Then tell us how you are occupying your time. The answer is, I am occupying my time by counting one by one all the sands upon the seashore. What would you think of that man? Would you require to retire from the jury box in order to consider the case? Would you not stop the argument before it went one sentence further? Well, that is precisely what you—I speak to the unbelieving or doubting man—are doing when you are trying to measure the infinite with a finite instrument, measure, or standard. Man, it cannot be done; why not know it, and take to honest breadwinning and healthy praying and rational watching? And here is a third man who is going to do something that will paralyse the world. I pray thee tell me what thou art after this sunny September morning. I am after a new idea. Relate it; we have not heard any new ideas for many a century, what is thine? To devise a method by which I can put the whole Atlantic Ocean into a thimble. Need we remain long with this man? have we not had enough of him in this one little sentence? shall we not go forward and look at the blue sea, and wonder concerning that under-heaven that holds by reflection all the suns and stars of the sky? Much better, I trow. Why laugh at these men when we ourselves may in some degree be doing the very self-same thing—trying to sound the infinite with a cord made heavy with lead at one end? Why try to know God when He is not to be known? Why endeavour to find Him out to perfection, when His perfection no mind can conceive and no tongue express?

But are we to leave the sun unmeasured? Certainly not, but take with you adequate instruments. But may we not try to count the sands upon the seashore? No; I will tell you why: if you could count them you could not state the result of your inquiry; arithmetic

would abandon you, figures would say, We cannot now pronounce our own name; we are good from millions to nonillions; there we can speak with a wide mouth, though we do not understand what we are saying, but when you get to cubed nonillions we have no name for that mighty sum. Thus you come, even along the line of arithmetic, upon the unknowable and the inconceivable and the unthinkable; but when you come upon God along that line you become a new species of insect—an agnostic! Why, you are as much an agnostic along the arithmetical line as along the theological line. Space is as mysterious as God; duration is as inconceivable as the deity; all things go into the unknown and the unknowable. Space says, I have no more words with which to explain myself, I melt into the infinite. Time says, My little chronometer has ticked off all its moments, and now I am absorbed in eternity. And speech—proud, eloquent—having finished its last perspiring climax, says, I can add nothing, now I will take to music.

So with this greatest of all subjects, the Godhead. We cannot know it, for it is higher than heaven, deeper than Hades; it belongs to all the unmeasured space, all the infinite intellectual territory, which has not yet been crushed into maps and made part of some elementary geography. But though I cannot measure the sun, I can enjoy the sunlight. That is my province, then; I cannot measure his diameter, but I can hail his summer and welcome his morning and bathe my cold life in his warm radiance. That is what we can do, and that we are called upon to do. We cannot count the sands upon the seashore, but we can walk over the golden path, and let the blue waves break in white laughter on our feet as we traverse that highway of beauty and vision. We cannot put the Atlantic into a thimble, but we can traverse it, sail upon it, turn it into a highway, utilise it, and make it not the separator, but the uniter of the nations.

So our not knowing and our not being able to do, need not prevent our enjoyment and our service and our discipline. Do not imagine that you can get rid of religion by any intellectual act: there still remain

the moral duties, the ten commandments, the eternal Sinai. Fool is he who thinks that there is no field beyond his own hedge, and that he has really nothing to do with religion because he cannot find out unto perfection the Almighty Father and Creator of all. To know that we do not know, that is wisdom; to know just where we ought to end, that is understanding. It is something to know that we are not artists; it is the next best thing to being artists. What trouble a man saves himself who never buys any paints or any brushes, and never spends a shilling upon palette or easel; what vexation and rubbing-out, what erasure and disappointment, the man saves himself when he knows that he is not a painter, and never will be one. He sees what time is left to him for what he can do by so clearly knowing what he cannot do. It is very sad—I could almost weep over it if I had not something better to weep over—to see a man doing water-colours that his own family will laugh at; but he thinks it is “in” him, and he is developing himself, and he persuades himself that he has the artistic temperament, and therefore must have his own way in the house. It is a sad thing when a man thinks he has got the artistic temperament when he has not got it. Blessed is he who knows that he does not know. Why, it is something for a man to know that he is not a giant; then he would save himself all the trouble that he takes in secret to measure himself against every bedroom door in the whole house to see if he cannot by stretching make himself at least one inch higher. But the man is a simple, an honest-hearted, a right trustable soul, that says, I know exactly what I am, I am five feet eight inches, and I am not going to stretch myself to try to make myself six feet six inches. If men would be just what they really are, if they would not seek to be what they cannot be, what time would be saved, what useful energy would be satisfactorily applied. If a man knew really that he could not preach—on that I need not say anything, for the public are as candid as Zophar the Naamathite, and will soon let him know the truth.

“What canst thou do? What canst thou know?”
We can know Jesus; He speaks the language of little children; we have heard Him say, “Come unto Me,

all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," and it was just like our mother talking. Sometimes I have heard the greatest preacher spoken of in this way, "It was not like preaching, it was more like as if he were talking to you." I said, That is the preaching I want; for a man to face me and say, Hear the word of the Lord; thou art in the wrong way; this is the way that is right; here is the profitable doctrine; I have come to thee to speak definitely and directly and responsibly to thee; arise! the Master calls for thee.

"What canst thou do?" We can do the commandments; at least, we can begin to do them; it will take us a long time to penetrate into their metaphysic, but we can begin to do their practical commands at once; we can make an effort in that direction. You would like to do something very great and sublime? Do not attempt it; it is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? You would like to have five thousand orphans? Have one to begin with; I know it would not suit the grandeur of so high and mighty a man as you are, but it would please Jesus; if you wait until you get the five thousand you will never get them, but if you take the first little child that is fatherless and motherless, and say, I will be feet to thee and eyes to thee and wisdom to thee, and I place myself in Christ's name and for the sake of Christ's Cross at thy service, dear little one, then you are already in the kingdom of God. "What canst thou do?" I will tell you; it shall be no message of my own conception, hardly a message of my own delivery:—"What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly." It is such disciplinary commands that makes Christianity unpopular. If Christianity had scented pillows to offer on which the head of weariness could rest, and if it could have some comfortable provision made on its return from slumber, Christianity would become quite a popular religion, but it is known by the badge called the Cross; its home is in Gethsemane and on Golgotha; its command is, Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God.

Instead, therefore, of drowning yourselves in some sea of metaphysics, why not take up with these grand

ethical commandments, these great moral attempts and endeavours, and work your way? And by-and-by the darkness will depart, and the white light of the morning shall kiss the hills of the east, and thou shalt know that the day of the Lord has come. This would be severe teaching; it would be impossible doctrine but for the grace of God that lies behind it: "My grace is sufficient for thee." I can do all things through the Christ that enables me; our sufficiency is of God. We will not be called great scholars, perhaps, but God will call us good scholars. I do not know that God cares much for the word "great"; I have heard Him again and again in His book say "good," "faithful"—terms of universal application because of universal utility. Do not wait until we can be great; let us try in the grace of God to be good. Do not wait until we can give a million pounds; throw in the two mites: and who knows to what harvests of gold they may one day come? What we do know let us put into practice; what we can do let us do with both hands earnestly; and if we do the will we shall know the doctrine, and if we obey the law we shall come into a great inheritance of reward. One day the Master will say, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou couldst not find Me out unto perfection, but thou didst touch the hem of My garment, and thou didst go upon My errands in the night-time, and do good by stealth, and help men without ever giving in thy name to swell thy reputation.

Let us not, therefore, think that we are called upon to give great intellectual answers to unfathomable questions, but we are called upon to do good according to our opportunities, and to redeem the time, and to wait patiently for the Lord, who will give us wider horizons and more enduring suns.

THE PREACHER'S SUNDAY MORNING TONIC.

I am more and more convinced that as preachers we must go back to the great Masters of the Evangelical pulpit if the Christian ministry is to flourish in its ancient power. Puritan preaching had no small share in the making of heroic and spiritual England. It had a specific and definite Message which it thundered with vehement energy, and which the country was compelled to hear. We must recall the days of consecration—the Altar, the Cross the Holy Ghost ! The political essay, the literary pedantry, the polish that never grapples with the most strenuous conditions and the most eager aspirations of the human heart, must be driven out for ever, and replaced by the true culture, the deeper piety, and the more ardent zeal of the invincible Puritanism. The Twentieth Century is upon us, how is the Christian Pulpit going to meet it ? It will be an exacting century. The hope of the pulpit is in distinctiveness, not in colourless neutrality. The pulpit is not to be an adaptation of the printing press ; it must realise its own peculiar function and pursue a course which admits of no rivalry and no blending either with passionless commonplace or frenzied sectarianism. With my whole heart I pray God to raise up in England an army of Puritan preachers, men who know the Cross, and are not ashamed of its stigma—men who know the Throne and have power with the King.—*Dr. Joseph Parker.*

“Like as a woman who taketh a child to nurse and feed for hire, although she should pray for it one part of the day, and sing to it another part of the day, and should wash and keep it as clean as possible the third part of the day, and yet should give it no milk, nor feed it, but suffer it to die from hunger, nevertheless, for all her singing and saying, washing and praying, she were a murderess ; or, as if a watchman were hired of the citizens to watch the city, and should leave his place and go into the city and help the masons to build the walls, or be occupied about some other affairs which he had no charge of, and in the meantime the enemy should come and kill some within the city, in thus doing he should be guilty of their death ; even so the minister who taketh a congregation to feed, although he be diligent in reading the service, singing of psalms, ministering the sacraments, or occupied about some affairs of the commonwealth, if he should leave undone the most principal part of his calling, which is preaching and catechising, and so the people perish for want thereof, in thus doing he is a soul-murderer, and guilty of all those that thus perish.”—*Cawdray, 1609.*

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, our Father, Thou dost come to us. We cannot find Thee out, but Thou canst find Thy child, and speak to him in little words which he can understand. We cannot find out the Almighty, but the Almighty can find us out, and speak to our hearts, to our sin and sorrow and whole necessity. It is from this point that we now humbly and in the name and at the Cross of Jesus Christ approach Thee with some boldness of love, that we may obtain mercy and Thy grace to help in every time of need. Every time is a time of need; every moment is a cry unto God, every day brings its own hunger and thirst and conscious necessity. Come to us and reveal Thyself to us whilst we tarry at Thy bleeding feet. The Cross never disappoints us; the Cross fills the whole firmament; it, too, is longer than the earth and deeper than the sea. It comes to us as Thine own heart, an expression of Thine own infinite pity; we throw the arms of our love around it, knowing that there, on Golgotha, no man who believes can die.

XLII.

MAN'S FREEDOM.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 28TH, 1899.

"It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?"—JOB xi. 8.



LET us continue the interesting and profitable meditation which we commenced last Thursday upon this inquiry, "What canst thou do?" Sometimes man is so conscious of strength that he feels he can practically do anything and almost everything, and yet I expect it will turn out before we conclude the meditation of this hour that we can do next to nothing. It pleases man to think that he is a free agent. So he may be, but we must first hear and consider his definition of the principal word in the terms of the assertion—the word "free." Always be clear about your definitions, and it is quite wonderful how you will curtail controversy. Nearly all discussion ranges round the qualifying terms, the adjectives or epithets; very little discussion ranges round the substantive term. So here we are confronted with the large word "free." Almost every man who knows anything about himself declares himself to be a free agent and a free man; and I think the Englishman's voice is loudest in the unmusical chorus. He likes to think himself free, and he is not free for one single moment in all the four-and-twenty hours of the day. "What canst thou do?" Let us take the self-boasting free man at any point, and ask him some simple but searching questions.

Had you any choice about coming into this world? Was it ever proposed to you in some anterior state whether you would come into this world or come into some other world? You are a

free agent—tell me, when did your freedom begin in this particular matter? Have you any freedom in the matter of going out of this world? can you go any day? do you prefer the summer to the winter for going out of this world? You are a free man, and you have invented certain little vulgar songs upon your freedom; tell me now, can you select the day of your death, the day of your exit, the season of your departure, the environment of your recession into the shadows? You do not seem to have much to say upon this question. Had you any freedom, choice, or election in the matter of your nationality? Did anybody or any soul ever ask you before you became clothed with this mortal body whether you would like to be born in sunny Italy, in classic Greece, in imperial Rome, in western seas, with their shivering and often sterile islands? You are a free agent; why did you select England, Ireland, or Scotland as your birth-place? why did you not enter this European continent by the sunny door of sunny Italy?

Had you any choice about your name? even your surname? Your so-called Christian name, which is no name at all, was discussed by father and mother at a council table, and several letters were written to absent friends for suggestions as to the name you should bear. Your freedom is dwindling quickly; when shall we see this free man and free agent and free Briton? Had you any freedom of action in the matter of your stature? Why did you elect to be five feet seven inches instead of six feet two inches? were you not consulted on the matter? But you are a free man and a free agent, and you revel in a great liberty; and you were never consulted as to your own height! It seems as if things had gone heavily against you; it appears to me that your cage is fast shrinking, and we shall hardly be able to see you within its iron bars presently. But let us wait. Had you any freedom of action in the matter of your complexion? You are a free agent; when did you take up your freedom? Why were you not born black instead of white, or yellow instead of cream and pink? Have you absolutely no choice about your own complexion? It is your own, it is not the complexion of the man who sits next to you, it is your own;

how did it become your own? You believe in free will; where does it begin, end?

Ay, it is when we get into citizenship, when we get into the larger life of the commonwealth, the larger space of the State, that we gain our freedom, and take up the franchise and sign our names as belonging to the liberty of great cities and great provinces. Believe me, it is not; I must ask you even here some penetrating and humbling questions. Why did you not bring out your house six inches further or set it six inches back? Because there is a Metropolitan Building Act, and by that Act we are bound to follow a certain line. But I thought you were a free man, and had on the livery and dined with the liverymen; do you tell me that you had to set back your house six inches from the line you would like to have chosen? Yes. Then where does your liberty begin? And as to that matter of taxation; of course there you have the liberty of a philanthropist and the freedom of a poet; there should be no doubt about that; you are so anxious to give to the State that you always take care to be out of the way when the tax-collector calls. I thought you were a free man and had a great liberty, and that you had made certain little vulgar, silly tavern songs about your freedom as Englishmen. Where is your freedom in the State? You cannot make your own dictionary, or if you can make it you dare not use it. You may have a hundred dictionaries in that secret drawer of yours for anything I know to the contrary, and you will be obliged to keep them there; the State will not allow you to publish them, or will not allow you at least to act upon them. You must not change the language in which you were born; there is no private interpretation of the English tongue, or of any other national language; it is a common right, and must be interpreted by a common grammar. Already I think your freedom is shrinking a good deal in magnitude.

You will not be allowed to alter even the pence table. That is a most extraordinary thing for a man who boasts of being so very free and so very independent and so highly individualistic. For a man who lives in a villa and in a mansion and in a castle and in a palace, or even in a flat—no such man can alter the pence table

that as little children we all chattered—"four farthings one penny, twelve pennies one shilling, twenty shillings one pound." Can I not alter all that? There are certain ways of altering it which would lead you into the undesirable companionship of a constable. But I thought you were free, a great free agent! You may be free at some points, but we have not found them yet. You cannot alter the multiplication table, and you say, "Britons never, never, never will be slaves!" They are slaves all the time—to the multiplication table, to a common idea, to a national testimony and standard. Am I not at liberty—a man fourteen stone avoirdupois and living in a large house and paying taxes—am I not at liberty to say there are nineteen shillings in a pound? You are at perfect liberty to say it, but you are not at all at liberty to pay it; you can have what idiotic ideas you like as to how many shillings there ought to be in a pound, but if you go on reasoning as you have already suggested, you will land first in the bankruptcy court, and then be sent to penal servitude. Freedom is dwindling; we shall have presently to say that we are in a cage, that we are bound, and that we belong to one another, and therefore that the State could not continue for a single day if we allowed individual opinions to control the points which have been thus incidentally raised. But can we not say that twelve times twelve are a hundred and forty-two? Certainly; you are at perfect liberty to say that if it will give you the slightest possible enjoyment, and you may say that twelve times thirteen are a hundred and four if it will relieve your feelings or in any way contribute to your realisation of a high ideal of manhood. But you must not go further; you must take care how you trifle with common property.

There is a language the grammar of which you cannot change; there is a pence table which will be turned one day it may be into a standard of your honesty; there is a multiplication table with which you must not trifle, or you may throw the whole State into confusion by giving new reckonings, new additions, and subtractions, and divisions. We must act in a common sense, under a common standard, at a common bidding; we must

allow the commonwealth to absorb mere individualism. So the State is very severe ; the State takes into its care our very grammar. There are certain men within almost two throws of a stone in wigs and gowns sitting for the purpose of interpreting grammar. What business have they to interpret grammar ? have we not all been to school ? are we not in some sense grammarians ? do we not all speak our mother tongue ? Yet there are bewigged and begowned men within some three or four hundred paces of this church who undertake to tell you what your own writing means and what your father's writing means, and you are not at liberty under certain circumstances to interpret your father's own will. I thought you were free ! Free in what sense ? You are not at liberty to kill your own child. The child, you say, is your own. I deny it ; that is your fundamental sophism and utter mistake ; the child is not yours, it is ours, it is God's ; it is life, and every red blood drop is God's. He will call us to account for our cruelty even to the animals that we often denominate inferior. The State will not permit you unduly to beat your horse, and the State will interpret the meaning of the word unduly, and you will not be permitted to interpret it for your own uses. The child is not yours, it is God's : then momentarily yours ; and all the time, since it came into being, it has belonged to civilised, law-abiding society. The great mistake which people make is that anything is theirs individually, independently, and to be used according to individual will. All society gathers round the little cradle with the little stranger, and all society will hang you if you kill that child ; every mother will lead you to the gallows, every father will give you short shrift, if you take away the life of your so-called own child. Where is your freedom ? where is your boasted independence ? and where your foolish cry a man may do what he likes with his own ? Possibly he may, but he must first prove that it is his own. Your money is not your own, because the hand that holds it is not your own. All things are under a beneficent, unchangeable sovereignty.

But may I not kill myself ? No, society will not allow you, and if you do it, society will bury you

under quicklime, and no epitaph shall mark the place of your unholy rest. Even the national Prayer Book, often so great in charity, will not pronounce its benediction over your grave if you put an end to your own life, but vagabonds of the baser type will dig a hole for you in the earth and fling you into it, and cover you up with quicklime, and you will be forgotten as a murderer of yourself. Take care, O thou boasted free man! Where is thy freedom, thy great liberty, thy magna charta of self-independence?

But is not a nation sovereign? Is not convocation or conference or union sovereign? May not any one of these do what it pleases? No; the first thing a nation has to do is to give away its own sovereignty, or it cannot be a nation. The first thing convocation or conference or general assembly has to do is to limit itself. Civilised institutions are only sovereign within the four corners of their own constitution. You must give notice of change; you can hardly alter a bye-law without giving three months or six months' notice of your intention to suggest such a change. Suppose convocation or conference could all be there at a given moment, has it not the power to proceed in a sovereign capacity? It has not; it has given away its independence and handed it to the custody of a certain constitution or law, and any deed done without consulting that constitution would be challenged in chancery and invalidated, and the boasted freedom trampled in the dust.

"What canst thou do?" Where is thy liberty? Art thou not hide-bound? Is not a watcher set over the sea? Is not leviathan under supervision? "I would be free as the ocean waves." Exactly; that you are at perfect liberty to be; but the ocean waves are all in prison. "I would be free as the wind." Be so; the wind is in gaol. All things are under law, control, definition, and so to say in a very serious measure responsibility. The stars must keep up their pace; if a star were to stagger for one moment it could never recover itself. One chance, one lapse, and—hell! It is an awful universe, a solemn place to live in, but a glorious sanctuary if accepted at the Lord's bidding, wrought out under the Lord's

inspiration and direction; then every dewdrop is a jewel, every star the beginning of a sun.

May not a man hold what opinions he pleases? I think so, but he is not at liberty always and under all circumstances to express them or to carry them out. I could myself, if I were so disposed, give you permission to-day to go to your house and build the largest cupboard that carpenters ever made, and shelve that cupboard from the top right away down to the floor, and fill all the shelves with divisions, and call all the divisions pigeon-holes, and put a label over every pigeon-hole, and I could give you permission to save up so as to have twelve opinions in every pigeon-hole. If that would at all relieve your feelings, I think that is about the most innocent idiocy I know of; there is really nothing violent about it; it does not put the life of the State in jeopardy. So if you please to have a cupboard fifty feet long by proportionate breadth and depth, by all means have it, and stuff it full, as if it were a feather-bed, with opinions—*your* opinions, not your wife's opinions, or my opinions, or the opinions of Parliament, but your own opinions; you, six feet high and a taxpayer, go and do that, and enjoy your liberty! But take care how you permit those opinions to find expression and application. You may have it as your solemn conviction that there ought to be no kings or queens; you may say that it is wrong for England to have a queen or a monarch of any kind; you may so say that as to be comparatively innocent as against the law, but just along that line there is a certain pale ghost called Sedition, and beyond that pale ghost is a blood-red figure called Treason, and if you promote sedition or perpetrate high treason, though you may do so conscientiously, and you may hold it strictly as a personal opinion, I do not guarantee your life, though you are a very free man, and sometimes you deliver lectures on free thinking and free speech, the like of which is not to be found in any history.

There is but one will, there is but one freedom. God's will settles everything. You can oppose it, you can, as we have just said, kill yourself, you can kill your own child, you can use your so-called freedom

in that base manner, but that is not the right use or the right interpretation of freedom. You are free to obey gravitation, not to oppose it; if you oppose it, which you may do, you will be crushed, you will be ground to powder. I am free to walk with the stars, to keep pace with the constellations, but I am not free to go the other way, and to back the stars out of their places. Gravitation is in this sense a poor symbol, but it will do for the immediate purposes, of the greater gravitation which we may describe reverently as the will of God—"Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Now you are in freedom; if the Son shall make you free, then you are free indeed, because He leads you to the movement of the eternal throne and the eternal decrees. The very hairs of your head are all numbered. To realise this conception of things, to accept it in the name of Jesus, and to keep it by the grace of Jesus, is the true freedom, the glorious liberty of the sons of God. If the stone fall upon you, you will be ground to powder, but if you fall upon the stone your obstinacy shall be broken, and your false, idolatrous conception of free will will be taken out of you, and soon after you will begin to pray.

I offer you a large universe, I offer you an immediate heaven of liberty, the liberty of faith, the heaven of grace, the security of obedience, and protection by the Omnipotent Arms. I do not want any liberty but the love of God; there is room enough there for all I need, for all I should desire. "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." A right sense of law is a true conception of liberty. God Himself has environed us by law. You have allowed the little bird to escape out of the cage. You have not; you have allowed it to escape out of *a* cage, but not out of *the* cage. No pebble on all *the* shore of the blue sea can get out of its cage; it *may* move from one shore to another, but it is still *in* the cage. And we may go out of the cage of the *present* and the cage of the *visible*, but we are only in the larger cage of a higher school and a nobler occupation. The finite can never be more than finite. There is of necessity but one Infinite. "Thy will be done." I ask no wider liberty.

THE PREACHER'S SUNDAY MORNING TONIC.

"The law of truth was in his mouth, and there was no iniquity found in his lips : he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from their iniquities."—MAL. ii. 6.

"This may teach us why the ministry of the Word, and the ministers of it, are so harsh and so unacceptable unto most men, if they be faithful and will seek by all means to convert men to God ; because they must turn them from their sin, separate them and their iniquities which they love so dearly (as Micah vi. 7). Sin is either natural or by custom, or both ; natural diseases are almost incurable, and no less diseases that grow into a custom, which is another nature. And the physician that should go about to cure these against a man's will, should have little thanks for his pains, and not be greatly welcome, when such things cannot be removed without some sharp and bitter medicines, great pain and grief. So in this. And here is the cause why a man's ministry, at the first coming to a place, is very acceptable for a while, because he speaks things good and wholesome, but somewhat generally, because he knows not the state of his flock and people ; but after he has lived some years, and sees their sins, and begins to speak home unto them, then he is unacceptable, because he would part them and their sins ; as the minister that should persuade a divorce betwixt a man and his wife whom he loves most dearly, should never be welcome to his house or company, so in this. It may be it is but the same he has often spoken of before, but then it was borne because they probably conjectured he meant not them ; but when he has been a while with them, and may know them to be guilty of the sin, though haply, and ten to one he did not, then it is intolerable, because they think he would separate them and their beloved sin, their profitable and delightful sin. All the while he will preach peace and comfortable things to them and bring the word of reconciliation, and tell them of God's love and God's mercy, and that he is sent to woo them to be married to God ; all the while he shall be kindly welcome. As he that should sue for a prince, to win the love of a woman to him, all the while he tells her of his honour and riches, and beauty, and such things, he shall be kindly welcome ; but if he come to tell her that she must separate herself from some place and company she loves well, and change her manners, and forsake her friends and father's house, he shall find his entertainment both for usage and countenance changed ; so in this. This makes oftentimes ministers, if they be not the more faithful, grow cold and careless, and so fall into many grievous sins."—*Stock*, 1568-1626.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee that we have come to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven ; to a great invisible assembly, yet making the air balmy around us by breathing upon it. This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven ; where Thou art heaven is : may we enter into the spirit of this assurance, and comfort ourselves as those to whom a great inheritance has been given. We thank Thee for the things we have overcome and laughed at in holy banter and mockery, even death itself, saying, Death is abolished, and asking where is its sting, and the grave, where its victory,—poor overthrown opponents of life ! We rejoice in heart coming to heart, in reunited lives, in old hopes and loves remingling, and knowing that they mean more than can be expressed in words,—a higher companionship, a diviner association, an eternal masonry. Enable us to lift up our thoughts, we humbly pray Thee, to these great conceptions and radiant ideas, lest we be slaves of the dust and victims of the devil. Thou hast given us a great portion, and we have not seized it all ; it is so great that we are almost ashamed to claim it every whit. Who can set forth the goodness of the Lord or count His mercies or set a limit to His love ? Behold, we cannot follow Thee in all Thy tenderness ; Thou carest for us, and Thou dost consider us in Thine heart. We thank Thee for every human touch, for every gentle word of kindness and comradeship ; we would cheer one another in the valley of the shadow of death, we would speak comfortably in the name of Jesus to those who are appointed to walk in lonely places and sometimes to linger in the isle of the devil. Thou knowest the way of this life, its trouble, its storm, its dark skies, its glorious summers, its gracious autumns ; Thou knowest it, and it is all within the plan of Thy love ; oh that we could live it and rest our souls on the breast of Jesus Christ ! We say to one another, All hail ! We are glad to have come back from the sea and the mountain and the desert place and the garden of beauty, back to old haunts, old services, and old associations ; and if we have left old age behind us and have taken on the beauty of youth, and if our flesh has come again as the flesh of a little child, it is

because the river of God runs through the deserts of earth. We thank Thee, we praise Thee, we would worthily magnify Thy name, for Thy daily mercy, for the constant bread given to us by Thine own hand. We have done the things we ought not to have done, and we have left undone the things that we ought to have done, and we have hardly voice enough to confess our sin, for our throat is choked with self-accusation. God be merciful unto us sinners ! remember the Cross ; we would venture to take Thee Thyself to the Cross, and to say, If Thou didst this for us Thou canst also forgive our added sin ; where sin abounds grace doth much more abound. O Lord God, remember the Cross of Thine own Son, and pity us, and take us again into Thy family and Thine heart. Some are overborne ; the load is too heavy, the road is too long, and there is a keenness in the wind that means coming winter, sealed fountains, killed flowers. Wilt Thou come to them, with the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His beams, and give Thy fainting ones heart again, and renew their youth. When Thou dost come Thou dost not bring old age with Thee, but childhood and youth and morning, and Thou art the God of the blossoming spring. And some are full of joy and laughter and holy merriment, for things have gone well with them ; may they not wax fat and kick, may they interpret Providence largely and not narrowly, and may they know that they have the sunshine that they may the better endure the darkness. And if any are disposed to leave Thee because they think they can do all they want to have done in their own strength, cut them not down in their folly, but spare them that they may learn to pray. Bless the strangers within our gates, the good kind hearts that have come together to help to sing our common hymn and to say amen to the common prayer. Tarry by the seaside or on the mountains with those who have not yet returned to us, and may they think kindly of this day and send a smile of their heart to the house which they love. The Lord be kind to us as He has ever been, the Lord hear us at the Cross, and bring all old people and young people, and little children, and may we all constitute one redeemed and grateful family. And let the Lord's blessing be upon the whole world ; it is in Thine hand and in Thine heart, and Thou wilt conduct its affairs. let men do or not do as they please.

To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the eternal mystery, the eternal blessing, be the hallelujahs of all the ages ! Amen.

XLIII.

THE MORNING STAR.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 24TH, 1899.

"And I will give him the morning star."—REV. ii. 28.



THE Lord has brought us back again in the sunshine; let us accept the sunshine as a happy omen. The Lord has not done with us yet. As I came along through your city I perceived that in all things you were too fearful and panic-struck and atheistic. For I saw upon the city walls this very beautiful September morning such words as "Threatening attitude," "Grave situation in the Transvaal," "Great disturbance" here and there. Him therefore whom ye ignorantly fear reveal I unto you by the grace of God; I will tell you his name, it is the devil. It is the devil who is at the root and base of all this Dreyfus business and Transvaal agitation; it is only the devil, and you are afraid of him! Do not turn your religion into cant; if you have a religion assert it, live it, do not take out of it all its morning hope and cheer. "Grave situation" indeed! "Menacing attitudes"! Ah me! the atheists say these things, not the believers. My only fear is that the believer may be entrapped and betrayed, and that he may sing his morning psalm, and repeat his standard creed, and then hasten with his poor penny to buy the devil's Bible about a threatening attitude somewhere and a grave situation. I am ashamed of such so-called Christian faith. The Lord reigneth. There will be no war; reason is against it, and civilisation, and the righteousness of God, and all things beautiful and true and kind. There will one day be a great war; America will be on the one side and not England on the other, but Europe; and that war will not be

without educational effect and without Christian hopefulness, for the Lord will direct it, and the issue will be a benediction. Why do we forget that it is the business of some men to get up wars? It is worth the while of a thousand men in the City of London to foment a war between England and the Transvaal; it would be like a lucky turn of the wheel to them; they are gamblers, speculators; they belong to the baser sort of the Stock Exchange community; it is worth their while to get up a war that they may refill their purses. Do not heed them; He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh at them, the Lord will have them in derision. It is pitiable, it is most ghastly, to see how Christian people run hither and thither to know what the latest telegram was from the Transvaal. The Lord reigneth; I want a lightning message from the eternal throne.

Jesus comes to us this morning in a tone of benediction. I love the stillness of the text; receive that text as an assurance that the Lord is the distributor of the prizes and the rewards, and He has promised in these wondrous letters to the Seven Churches of Asia that one day He will have a grand prize distribution:—I will give, I will give, I will give,—as if He would distribute His universe amongst those who have turned it into an altar. It is wondrous music. “To him that overcometh I will give to eat of the tree of life.” Observe, it is to him that overcometh. Expect war, expect strenuous contest; the Lord is watching the contestants, and He is breathing down the hot thunderous air this Gospel message: To him that overcometh. . . . Cheer thee, strike again, contest once more, now again! hearts up! to him that overcometh will I give a great festival; I will pluck the fruit from the tree of life, and he shall have abundance. Nothing for the coward, nothing for the runaway, nothing for him who would magnify his weakness into a kind of piety; but everything to him that overcometh; he that endureth unto the end shall be saved. Salvation is at the end; to him that overcometh will I give the hidden manna, I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written. Who writes it? Who writes all the names on all the rocks? Read me the moss; stand before some hoar

rock, and read me the moss. Why be blind, why insensate, why make a little universe when we might have heaven upon heaven? He that overcometh will I clothe with white raiment, and no soot shall blacken it, no foulness pollute it; whiter than the snow, more enduring than the ages; I will give, I will give, I will give; it is prize day, and God is the creator and the distributor of the prizes. Shall there be one of us to whom no prize is given? Shall we turn away, unprofitable servants, men who knew the Lord's will and did it not, men who turned the beggar from the door, men who said to the poor, Be ye warmed and be ye filled, but gave not the wherewithal to make them as they ought to be? Is there to be a thousand-fold crowd not receiving a prize? Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and I will write upon him My new name. Are not all these minor prizes? Is there not some larger reward? Yes. What is it? "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne"; and the Father shall have countless millions of sons, mighty giants, sons of the winning war, yet by the grace of God become entitled to sit with Christ on the sapphire throne.

In the meantime what I like best, because my heart needs it most, is the promise made unto the faithful in Thyatira:—"I will give him the morning star." The Lord would seem not to keep any of the universe to Himself; He divides His creation with His children. What have you done? By Thy grace I have fought strong temptations, and I have won. Come thou, sit down under the shadow of the tree of life, and I will pluck fruit for thee. What hast thou done? I have had a strenuous time, every nerve has been strained, temptations were poured upon me like fiery darts. Sit down; thou shalt be recruited with the manna of God. And what hast thou done? I have endeavoured to keep Thy Word in difficult positions and situations; I have been sore pressed to disobey Thee, but by Thy grace, and by Thy grace alone, I have overcome. Stand! I will give thee the morning star,—sign of royalty, signet of the King, pledge of more. Morning is the poetry of the day. Who can count its jewels

of dew? Morning means more than it seems to mean, for it means vanished night. Where is the night? Gone! Where that darksome, fearsome midnight? Fled away! Where is it? None can tell. The morning star has nothing to do with nightly gloom. The nightmare is past, the sorrowful travelling alone is ended, solitude is a conquered enemy, and the man who has overcome by the grace of Jesus Christ shall have the morning star. Is it a living star? Yes. Have I not heard of it in another relation? Is the morning star but some flash of perishing radiance? Oh no! it is clothed with personality. Tell me how. "I am the bright and the morning star." It is a star within the star, a Redeemer, a personality. The stars are embodiments of God. I will pluck for the faithful and true, the valiant and the conquering, heaven's chief jewel, and he shall wear it on his glowing heart. I will give him the morning star.

"Morning." Jesus Christ never associates Himself with night. We have a few peculiar, anonymous, unmanageable people who club themselves together and conduct their affairs at small expense, and try to warm one another into a kind of ghastly enjoyment, but the effort always fails; the people to whom I refer are the pessimists, and they live at an unknown address. Do not let the pessimists overcome you; have in you a light that will burn out their darkness. Jesus Christ is the light of life, the light of the world; you are so constituted it may be—I speak to the few, not to the many—as to be soon nervously depressed, and those grim pessimists would soon persuade you to give up your faith in God. Pessimists never did anything for the world. We cannot judge them by their fruits, for fruits they have none; they are men who darken the soul, their very shadow is descending night; in their voices there is no music, on their face there is no illuminating smile. Jesus Christ always associates Himself with morning:—"When the morning was come." And God has always associated Himself with the morning:—"Come up early in the morning," said He to Moses; and He has always been talking about the morning. Christianity is associated with morning fulness, morning impulses, morning ideas and

conceptions and brightness; and not with night-reflections and pessimistic meditations and the killing of the heart by self-impeachment. Always Jesus Christ is associated with the morning light, the white gleam on the eastern hills, the opening portal, the rising of the sun. They misunderstand the Christian faith utterly who associate it with decayed empires and decayed ideals and wasted ambitions and sickening fear. There are some people whose names I have forgotten, because I never took any pains to learn them, who always say that Christianity is an effete faith, it is outworn, it is obsolete, it has had its day. It is our joy as Christian believers to feel that the morning of Christ is always coming, the light is always rising, the fighting line is thrown out a thousand miles ahead, and the light cannot be blown out by storm or by wrath of man.

The time will come when these ideas will be seized, will be believed, and will be applied. Christianity is always new. A sermon is never old if it is true; a discourse upon Christ is never old if it touches the immediate sore of the heart and the overpowering darkness of the soul. The beatitudes are as new to-day as when they were breathed across the dew of the morning. What we want is not a new book, but a new reader of the old Book, the man who can put the music of his experience into the eloquence of the Divine testimony. Christianity has always a new programme, a new opportunity, a new inspiration, a new possibility. But our young men seem to be dying; they are so taken up with frivolities as really to have no kingdom of God and no orient conception of the radiance of the Divine kingdom. We are dying for want of young men. When the prophet was asked how this thing was to be done, he said, By the young men, the young princes; agricultural labourers they may have been in actual position, but princes of God in the royalty and dignity of their spiritual convictions. Let that be the motto of all coming centuries, By the young men, by the young princes, by the morning, by the early light. Oh! pray your first prayers before the first dewdrop has been exhaled by the sun.

He who has the morning star has the noon. I wish

that idea could penetrate our minds, and hold them; then should we be strong men, and no longer panic-driven and dumb because of fear. He who has the morning star has in that star the pledge that he shall have the noon, the midday, the zenith gleam. He who has Christ has heaven. If we really believed the promises of the Cross, we should now be in the upper sanctuary, there should be no separation, no distance, no sensible disseverance of soul from soul. He who has the acorn has the oak. Why do we not realise the promises, and carry them out in all the fulness and poetry and idealism of their suggestiveness? Instead of that how prone we are to droop our heads and to be alarmed by placards that announce threatening situation and serious menaces, and a very unexpected telegram from any quarter of the world. And these poor sickly creatures seem to like it. If ever they are cheerful for one moment in the day in the house, it is when they announce that there is a grave situation. I suppose that such people must be provided for, the Lord in His providence must not leave them in utter neglect, and so they become funereally and most ghastily cheerful, and speak to people they have never spoken to before, to announce that there is a grave situation. Where? I do not know exactly where, but I saw it on the walls as I came along. You will see a delightful situation on the same walls to-morrow morning. Better wait a while! Now he who has the Christian faith has the Christian realisation; it is a completed fact in his experience; he must live a few days or years longer in order to see the detail of it carried out, but he who has the witness of the Holy Spirit in his own heart has heaven, and is already throned on the sapphire hills, and is already permitted within the golden and jasper walls of heaven.

"I will give him the morning star." Everything else goes out but the Christian faith—which, in other words, is, everyone goes down but Jesus Christ, and the man to whom Jesus Christ has given Himself—Himself who is the bright and morning star. Shall I startle any fearful friend if I say that nothing really endures but the Gospel? If you watch the processes of literature and statesmanship and general civilisation,

you will find that each one of them lives only to rub out what it did yesterday. But the Gospel of Christ has a message for every morning, a star for every opening day, a hymn, a psalm, a resilient anthem for every valley. I hear the soldiers tramping down that deep valley, and methinks I hear them sing as they go, and they sing, It shall not be always thus; to-morrow shall bring us deliverance; already the ground is ascending, the grade is heightening, and in a few more days we shall see the high trees on the high hills, and the wide sky—that great blue revelation of God whose reading is difficult to acquire, but which being acquired is an eternal joy and an enduring satisfaction. “Whom the gods love die young.” I believe it; because the god-loved soul is never old. They got the right idea of things in the olden times when they reckoned six and seven hundred years of age as nothing, simply putting it down in the record as a mere family fact. It is we poor atheists with our small books in our hands that talk about a man being eighty-four, eighty-five, and then the open mouths of ignorant wonder and the exclamations about eighty-seven. Why, in the old, old time—call it poetry or idealism; call it what you like—in the old register, the true idea is given, that hundreds of years mean mere breathings, mere accents in the psalm of duration. When the old man dies at eighty, ninety, he dies young; the proverb is quite right. Or if you substitute the word “early” for the word “young” you do not take away the meaning which I wish to indicate. “Whom the gods love die early”; whenever they die they die into the morning, and the morning is round about them whilst they are yet dying. There is no old age in love. O soul of man, put away from thee the idea of old age! It does not belong to the new temple, the new sanctuary, the final revelation in Christ Jesus. Bid it begone; old age is not among the jewels of God. But the morning star is chief of those jewels. If thou wouldst always be young, be good; if thou wouldst not know when old age cometh, be stooping to serve some little child, and thou wilt not know that old age has come, and gone, and left thee—a child!

PRAYER.

LORD of our life and God of our salvation, we have come up to Thine house with a purpose. We are here at the bidding of our own hearts, and here by the constraint of Thy Holy Spirit, and here because Thy bounty to us has been so great that we must unite in common prayer and common psalm and shout together the praises of the Lord. We thank Thee that we are here under no other constraint, no penalty hangs over us ; we are here because of the inspiration of love and gratitude and hope. We must praise Thee, we cannot be dumb, our love is not a silent love, it comes with its exclamation and hallelujah and shout of joy. The Lord has done great things for us, why should we not be glad ? For us Thou hast built the mountains and lighted the stars and made the earth to grow its fruits ; for us Thou hast shed the blood of Thy Son. We know not the fulness of the mystery, we cannot penetrate into the secret of such love, but it is round about us, high beyond us, a perpetual blessing, a perpetual challenge to our devotion and our thankfulness. We bless Thee for the spaces we cannot measure, for the things we cannot understand, for the things which are far away from these fleshly eyes ; we would not be without these true riches. Once we thought to understand God and to find out the Almighty unto perfection, and, lo, we found it was higher than heaven, what could we do ? deeper than hades, what could we know ? So now we rejoice to be within our cage, and to see through all the split bars the far-away horizons and the coming days and the advancing kingdoms. We come to praise Thee for Thy gifts to us personally, socially, nationally ; Thou hast given every man something, every little child has had some little flower from the garden of Thy love ; and the lame and the blind, yea, the deaf and the dumb, has his token of love. We will not look at the darkness and the infirmity and the fear and the great darkness of night that broods upon many a life, we will look out towards the morning, and the stars rising before the dawn, and we will think of the times of gladness we have already enjoyed, the old psalms and the sacred songs and the minstrelsy that is love without words. We praise Thee for all these. Oh the childhood sunshine, the girl-and-boy delight of the old, old time ! and the finding of new paths, and the hearing of new voices in the air, and the watching of the pure blossoms of the spring, and all the dreams and delights and forecasts and anticipations, and words of written love, and love unutterable. May we not brood over these as if they were all

gone, may we think of them as the husbandman thinks of the seed he has sown, and may we wait patiently and hopefully for the harvest coming and the time of the sickle and the gathering-in of ripe fruits and golden corn. Look upon us in all our distresses and tribulations ; rebuke us if we fear too much and allow fear to triumph over faith. Lord, increase our faith ! teach us that all things are under Thy government ; Thou slumberest not, neither dost Thou sleep ; when Thou dost see the nations surging upon one another in unaccountable wrath, dost Thou not say, Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing ? We have forgotten God, we have trusted to our own sagacity and statesmanship and far-sighted wisdom—that greatest of all blindness. Oh that we had never spoken ! that we had simply, silently put our trust in the living God. The Lord stay the sword, and turn back the cannon, and speak peace into the hearts of the nations, that they may no longer delight in war. The Lord have us all in His holy keeping. Give wisdom to our guides, rulers, and directors, and to the heads of all nations and kingdoms, and may we see the Son of man triumphing over the lust of the unsubdued heart. If any soul has come into Thine house sad, depressed, wholly overcast, the Lord meet such in the darkness and whisper to such words which their hearts alone can understand. And if any are here with new joys and great delights and cloudless hope, the Lord bless them, comfort them, and put the spirit of wisdom in their hearts, lest in their joy they should forget to pray. Be with all our dear ones everywhere, by the seaside, and on the mountain and on the sea and in far-away lands : the Lord be with them all as we think of them in the dream of our love. If any man would do evil, the Lord break both his arms ; if any mouth would be opened in slander and lying and blasphemy, the Lord put gravelstones between the teeth. If any man would do good and show light and sweetness and charity, the Lord's angels be round about such a thousandfold, that their holy purpose may be completed. The Lord be with the stranger within our gates, the kindly heart that wishes us well, and that says, Peace be within thy walls, O Zion, and, Jerusalem, the Lord fill thee with His light. And then some other day we shall remember that we met this morning amid cloud and rain and fear, and yet had a secret light and a true inward joy that we could hardly tell.

We always gather at the Cross ; we always pray at the Cross ; we always bring our distresses to the Cross ; and we would never take them back again to ourselves, for in the Cross are our sins forgiven, and our burdens are dissolved and dispersed like morning clouds. Amen.

XLIV.

SEEN . . . NOT SEEN.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 1ST, 1899.

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."—2 COR. iv. 18.



HAVE been thinking much about words you will find in the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, chapter iv., verse 18. "Seen . . . not seen; temporal . . . eternal,"—the two languages each with a grammar of its own; two styles of music, two gamuts, two different ranges altogether of utterance. We shall get into the profitableness of the theme if we read the whole verse and the verse before as well: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Here is a new standard of proportion and a new light of colour and a new expression of life; here, indeed, is a new language bigger and better than our mother tongue. "Our light affliction"—of which we made so much and groaned so deeply; we turned the summer into winter and the day into night: and, lo, a voice came to us suddenly, and found our hearts in a thrilling whisper, saying, "light affliction," hardly anything worth mentioning, quite a matter of the surface; there is no duration in it. You should look in the right direction if you would see your own self, O soul; what is now accounted by you as a severe affliction is working out something beyond itself; it is working

out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. What does "eternal weight" mean? I never heard these two words put together before; what is the relation of "eternal" to "weight" or of "weight" to "eternal"? It should be thus expressed: Weight upon weight of glory, dawn upon dawn of light, morning upon morning of blaze and radiance. And how does this wondrous vision come about? It comes about whilst we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. But how can we look at things that are not seen? That you must find out. We misconceive this passage frequently; we set earth and heaven in antithesis. But that is not the proper apposition of the words. It is not earth and heaven, the things which are seen are of the earth earthy, and the things that are not seen are of the heavens heavenly; that is not the right reading of the text at all. The very things that are round about you, yea, the very things on which you can lay your hands, are both seen and not seen. You need not go to heaven for your completion of the analogy; it is in your own breath, it is in your own words; it is within thee, without thee, round about thee; written on the whole belt of things; on the great broad band of gold that keeps all things together are the words, The things which are seen, and the things which are not seen. This is not a theological term at all, we need not go to church to find it out; we have only to look into our own consciousness and our own habit of mind, and we shall find that we carry both man and God, a moment and an eternity.

This may all be simplified, so that the slowest and youngest mind can comprehend and appreciate it. Here are Acts of Parliament; they are things that are seen; they are sold, they might be sold by weight. Are there any things within the Acts? There is one thing within them—Law. The Acts are seen and temporal; Law is unseen and eternal. In having the Acts of Parliament we have Law? No; you have a law, or for the time being the law, but Law stands alone without adjective or epithet or qualifying article. You can change the Acts of Parliament, they are seen and temporal, and they were made to be broken;

otherwise the country would have little or nothing to do at headquarters, there would be a great dearth of employment; but you cannot change Law. *That* is the force that keeps things together, subtle, impalpable, imponderable, the gravitation that has no shape, and that must condescend almost infinitely to put itself even partly into words. So we need not go into the Bible and into theological books and ecclesiastical places in order to find the very secret of this great passage written by the immortal apostle. We have the whole of it in this one simple illustration: Acts of Parliament seen, Law unseen; Acts of Parliament temporal, Law eternal. And we are only wise in the degree in which we catch the spirit of Law and put it into formal words and give it civic and imperial applications. It is not for us to make Law, but it is for us to make little saleable toys called the laws. Unless we penetrate into the very marrow of that distinction we shall lose the text.

The creed is seen; Faith is unseen; that is the distinction. You can alter a creed, you cannot alter Faith. I do not say a faith, or the faith, or some faith, but Faith; a word so grand as to need no adjective, a solitude so sublime as to be a trinity. The creed comes and goes. If churches had only understood the difference between creed and Faith, we should have had very little controversy. We may all be believers in the deepest and best sense, but we may not all be creedists. As if Faith could be written upon the back of an envelope; as if Faith could be issued in an octavo volume; as if Faith gave the printer anything to do! Creeds keep men busy. Their opinions, their views, their theories, their orthodoxies of the moment: Faith, sublime, solemn, still, eternal, may keep the whole world together, without the world being able to analyse the fires that consolidate it into holy unity. Sometimes men talk about their creeds as if their creeds were revelations; they are only guesses, clever conjectures, something resolved upon by one generation to be amended or forgotten by another; but Faith abides, Faith rules. By making creeds we make infidels; where we make laws we make offenders; let the laws alone, the offenders would never be created, and therefore would not need to be dealt with. But we

make creeds, and therefore separate men; if we preached Faith, we should unite them. But what would the world be without controversy?

Denominationalism is a thing seen; Worship is a thing not seen. Sectarianism is temporal, the Church is eternal. There are many persons who give themselves much needless trouble by not distinguishing between Church and churches, between denominations and the Church. And many persons are running up and down the earth endeavouring to create what they call unity. They can neither create it nor destroy it. It would be like a man running up and down the earth offering to brighten the stars; it would be exactly the same. The Church and the unity of the Church are beyond the touch of Pope or Archbishop or minister or layman. The Church never wants uniting; it was always united; it is best represented by the seamless chrysolite without flaw or break. But it is not seen; it is the inner force that keeps the peace, secures and consolidates and perpetuates the true holiness. But we have our consultations and conferences, and we offer to meet one another. Good God! that one of the smallest of the intellectual insects should offer to meet another! It is too solemn, it is too farcical. The Church is in her Lord, in her Saviour, in His blood crimson with the redness of it, and is one all the world over; not in form, not in creedal subscription and attitude, but in that unseen gravitation-like force that binds hearts to a common centre. Oh, waste of energy that we have seen about the denominations, and what we call in the language of a very tumid charity various Christian communions. Why not think of the Church, the Bride, the Lamb's Wife, the great heart union between the Lord and those who have yielded to the persuasions and redemptions of His grace? why not say, We are all one in heart and soul and purpose, though we may have our cutaneous and superficial distinctions, differences, and even hostilities?

The day is a great controversy. We call it Sunday, Sabbath day, the Lord's day, the first day, the seventh day; we wonder if it began on Friday and went over Sunday, or if it began late on Saturday night, or if it began on what we should call Monday morning;

and we have written pamphlets upon this, wonderful pamphlets, hardly ever read, but still there to be read if anybody has time to read them. What is the eternal thing, the grand Platonic conception of the universe? Not Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, Sunday, but Rest. And that you cannot change; man claims it, God accords it, heaven blesses it. Men will wrangle at the wrong point; they are stormy in their wrath about things that are really of hardly any consequence whatever; now what I want to be at in all my searching is this, not the Act of Parliament, but Law; not the formal creed, but Faith; not the local hospital, but the universal Philanthropy; not the particular day as a mere term in the calendar, but a day set apart for Rest, joy, high festivity, realisation of the family masonry and love—a grand religious conception of time, and a connecting of little perishing day with the eternal rest.

We might apply the same thought in even the highest direction of all. The Bible in a certain sense is but a book; it was written by men, copied by men, printed by men. We do not look at the merely mechanical book; when we speak of the Bible in our highest moods we speak of the revelation. We do not ask the printer's permission to read it, we know it; we do not ask the priest, the robed fraud, to read it for us, we claim to read it for ourselves, for it is the Father's speech to the son's heart, and between the Father and the son, meaning by son the whole human race, there is a confidence, subtle, impenetrable, all but omnipotent. All the controversy rages about the mechanical book: Who wrote it? was this written in the Maccabean period? can we trace this psalm to post-exilian sources or pre-exilic dates? Hence the controversy and the expensive communication between man and man. The critic says that David could not have written the twenty-third psalm because he says he will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever, and David did not build the temple. Oh, the folly, the madness! Jacob, long before David was ever thought of, said in the rocky place where he slept, This is none other than the house of God—the unbuilt house, not built by hands; not seen, but eternal; the house in the clouds, in shadow, in outline;

the precursor of all the temples and altars yet to be reared by human hands. Why not look into the poetry, spirituality, and the true idealism of things, and catch the morning ere it dawns?

This would certainly abbreviate and amend many controversial methods. We subsist upon distinctions that ought never to be made; we confound the pettiness or the difference with the sublimity of a subject. What is man to do? He has made himself a spade and a plough and a hammer, and he is very fond of making all sorts of toys of that description; and if you go and tell him that there is really no market for them, why, you crush the man's ambition. What could he do without a spade, and without shears with which to cut things? He would seem to be wasting his time if he could not kill something, and in order to kill something he must have a gun. You would wreck the market-places of the world if you kept men to the inner subjects, to the not-seen topics, to the eternal music. But to that it must come.

We have now great discussion about adult baptism and infant baptism, pædo-baptism and anti-pædo-baptism. Have I not often told you that these controversialists are lost amid the adjectives of their own creation? If you were to take away their adjectives you would destroy their comfort in controversy. I believe, not in adult baptism or infant baptism or water baptism, or sprinkling or plunging; I believe in Baptism. He that believeth and is baptised with the Holy Ghost, with the water of fire, shall be saved. By all means let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind if it is worth while being persuaded upon any such subject. For my part, I baptise little children—wee, wee mites of things; I do not think I dare have done it with so much joy if my Lord had not whispered to me, as the mothers were bringing the little ones to my arms, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." He told me, and I will not refuse anything which He denominates the kingdom of heaven.

As for the public profession of this great faith, never profess any creed. I have said again and again that I would not subscribe any creed that my own hand

had written ; I have told you the reason, namely, that language changes, words have not the same weight or colour in one century that they have in another ; I will sign it for the day, but not for the morrow. We do not want an ism, we want a Person. Who is that Person ? The Son of God, the Son of man, the atoning Saviour of the world. I would not go to the last great assembly having on a coat with ism written on the back of it ; I would rather go naked, crawl round to my Father's back door, and ask Him to take me into His arms. Jesus Christ is the Church, the Saviour of the Church, and the Creator of the Church, and I do not want anything to do with any ism under heaven ; I want to love my Lord, Son of man, Son of God.

Remember that the great things in life are all not seen. You cannot see Love, you can only see its incarnations. You cannot see Faith, you can only see its conduct, for it becomes a motive and turns the soul into action and into deeds of purity and charity. Thus would I rest. The little child can see the rosy-cheeked apple that its mother brought away from the orchard ; the child can see the apple, but not the love that plucked it. As a little child it must begin where it can ; the apple is an apple to the child, the metaphysical or penetrating force of the soul has not yet begun to assert itself, and therefore the little fingers and knuckles clutch the apple, and the little mouth shapes itself into an unspeakable doxology, and the whole earth is a beautiful place so long as that apple continues to exist. But the little child did not see the love that thought of it, the love that asked for it, the love that put it in a safe place, the love that dreamed for the child a sweet surprise ; the child does not see the love that folded the apple in the tissue paper, and the fingers that moved so deftly and opened the cotton wool in which the little prize lay snugly. All the little child could see was the rosy-cheeked apple ; all the ministry of preparation and love and forecast the little child knows nothing about. One day it will be explained in heaven !

PRAYER.

WE bless Thee for the morning and for the evening which are one day. We thank Thee that Thou hast set us amidst days and hours, so that we may measure our progress, and give heed to our latter end. Thou hast given us of years a handful, Thou dost hold us accountable for the spending of them. May we know that time is a trust committed unto us by the living God, and may we be able at least to return a good account of the uses to which we have put the golden hours. We thank Thee for the music of the whole time. Breaths of the morning strain, and the tender minor tone of the evening psalm. Keep the young always amongst us, bright and cheerful, full of vivacity and hopefulness, and noble animation. May we not reject those who are further on in life, who know more of its bitterness and sorrow, and ineffable deprivation. May we live together as a united household, bound into one mass by the cross, by its speaking blood, by its eternal sacrifice, and by all the meaning of its heart-melting pathos. Thou knowest us altogether. These suppliants have bent themselves before Thy altar, and have come in from the sunshine and the brightness that they might spend an hour with Thee in the inner places, amid the sacred mysteries, that they may feel somewhat of the breath of the eternal, and go out from the sanctuary into the market-place, and the sick chamber, and to the thoroughfares and occupations of life. God bless us every one. If we are conscious of evil it is the miracle of Thy cross that we should be so conscious. We bless Thee that the hardness of our hearts is not incurable because we know ourselves to be sinners, and at the foot of the cross each man cries for himself, "God be merciful to me a sinner." There are some tears we cannot touch, we can but shed them. We cannot stop such sorrow. Do thou sanctify it to us, and make us stronger for the momentary weakness. If Thou hast changed the centre of gravity we would read the meaning of this change and follow obediently every indication of Thy sacred and loving purpose. We thank Thee for this change of point, and we would ask Thee to give us the Holy Spirit that we may rightly interpret it and apply its stimulating lessons to the few days of which we are in trust. Poor fools have been looking at time and missing eternity, they have been satisfied with noise and have missed all the music, they have come in too late to hear the voice of the angels. O that we might be this day converted from all this folly and utter self-injustice and degradation, and that now at the cross

we might see there is nothing worth looking at but things eternal, and nothing worth doing but the great spiritual service in the power of the Holy Ghost. Amid all this evening sunshine there are countless thousands dying, countless thousands more watching by them tremblingly, their hearts full of heaviness. We leave with Thee that load we cannot carry. Jesus, Thou art here, behold us at Thy throne pleading for ourselves and for others.

PRAYER.

ALmighty GOD, we thank Thee for Thy Son Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of the world, in whose great name we now approach Thy throne. Great is the Saviour and greatly to be praised, and His name is to be had in everlasting remembrance by those who have felt the comfort of His grace and the cleansing of His blood. We thank Thee that Thou wast manifest in the flesh, we bless Thee for One whose name was Immanuel, God with us. For all His wondrous sayings we thank Thee. He was the express image of Thy person, Thy very glory incarnate. When we see Jesus we see God. Enable us to look with reverent eyes and to direct a reverent expectation towards the Lord; then shall we be abundantly satisfied with the provisions of Thine house, and our hearts shall be lifted up with new and imperishable joy. Bring us more closely to Christ that we may be brought more closely to Thyself. May we look back to the eternities which Thou hast partially revealed, and see Thee from before the foundation of the world planning our salvation, purposing the redemption of the entire race of man, and may we stand as in a temple of vision and be grateful that we are connected with all the ages past and coming. Thus by the enlargement of the vision may we lose our littleness and all its woe. Amen.

XLV.

GOD MADE VISIBLE.

"God was made manifest in the flesh."—1 TIM. iii. 16.



HIS does not come upon the reverent reader as a surprise; it comes upon him as the culminating point in a most wonderful plan. If you open the Bible at 1 Timothy iii. 16, and know nothing about what has gone before, you will be stunned as if you had suddenly come upon a blasphemy. That is not the way to read any text in Holy Writ. You must first read the context; indeed, as an expositor of the Scriptures and an occasional teacher of young men who are preparing to preach, I have ventured to say that in order to give out a text so as to secure the confidence and the gratitude of the hearer, you must read the Bible from the very beginning up to the text of the day. If the people were really in earnest about preaching, and all its redeeming and ennobling purpose, they would revel in this method of preaching; it would be new, it would be like being present at the creation of the universe; people would then see behind things, and be able to trace how things came to be. In order to understand fully 1 Timothy iii. 16, we should begin at Genesis, chapter i., verse 1, and steadily and musically read through the whole revelation, and then 1 Tim. iii. 16 would be the very thing we had been waiting for all the time. Selecting the local text, which some foolish people are so fond of doing, we miss all the light, all the music, and come upon the face of a stranger when we ought to warm ourselves in the countenance of a friend.

"God was made manifest in the flesh." Impossible! That is what you would naturally exclaim if you had read nothing before 1 Tim. iii. 16. You would feel that

it was irreverent; you would say, No, this surely could never be,—God in flesh, God in shape and form and figure, God visible; it is a profanity, it is a lie. I am not surprised that you should pronounce that verdict, because it is the verdict of absolute ignorance. If you had steadily read through from “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” you would have said, This 1 Timothy iii. 16 is a natural and adequate climax; it accounts for everything, it is a sun within the sun and above it; the light of the universe. But people do not care for wise preaching; they are impatient with sound, thoroughgoing Biblical exposition; and this accounts for so-called unbelief or misbelief or worldliness or indifference. If they would always begin the Gospel of John by reading all the books prior to it, there would be no infidels, there would be no unbelief, and the world would fall away into its right perspective, and the eternal would be seen to be the great. That age will come—long after you and I have crossed the river.

I cannot read the Bible from the very beginning (I live it, I have no other companion, I love it, I do not preach it, I rebreath it out) without feeling that Someone is coming. You speak of this and that being in the air; you speak of omens and signs and premonitions; perhaps we hardly know what we mean when we use these pregnant and significant words. We do not feel that the right man has yet come, though we read in Genesis and to the end of the Pentateuch; the leaves are stirring with an air blown from another book; and when we read all the history volumes we still feel that Someone, be His name what it may, is on the road,—I saw a flash of light, I heard a voice, I felt as it were the darkness of a transparent shadow—a most curious and self-contradictory thing, now an angel, now a dream, now a prophet, now a great thunder voice, now a still small whisper comforting the heart. He has not yet come, but He is coming, He is on the way: did I not catch the blast of a trumpet millions of miles away, a rising, falling cadence? Is it a signal that the King approaches? I know not, but I read away through my prophets and my psalms sure that perhaps to-morrow, to-day, there may be another Personality amongst us. Thus coming upon 1 Timothy

iii. 16, the text of the morning, I am not surprised; I have received an explanation, I know now what it all meant: God was made manifest in the flesh; I expected nothing else.

Now if I had no other corroborative and illustrative Scriptures available, I might have the fear of the Revised Version before mine eyes; I rejoice, however, to find that this is not a text only, but is part of a revelation, that it is sustained, supported, and illuminated by other passages as distinct, as graphic, and as comforting as itself. "I and my Father are one. . . . My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. . . . He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." That is enough; we now come to the doctrine of Paul fortified by the doctrine of Christ Himself; they preach the same doctrine of the Sonship and the Godhead, and I feel that my heart is, so to say, face to face with a God not invisible, but seen, palpable, at hand. The comforting idea, therefore, is that if we study Jesus Christ rightly, we are keeping company with the Eternal God Himself. When we say, What would God do? we have only to inquire what Jesus did; when we wonder about the transcendental metaphysics of the Godhead, a voice says to us, You cannot go far along that line, but you can see God in Jesus Christ. Never ask any questions beyond the visual line; put your feet in Christ's footprints, stop where He stops, move as He moves; for he that hath seen Christ hath seen the Father. It is, therefore, not our business to trouble ourselves with some philosophy of the Deity, it is our glorious and ever-comforting privilege to keep company with the Son of God, and to study all His ways, and receive all His teaching in the simplicity of tenderest love. See, then, what an opportunity is before us! We can see God! "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. . . . God was made manifest in the flesh. . . . The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His image." We shall not, therefore, longer talk about the invisible God, the unseen God, the mysterious God; we shall also speak about the visible God, the God nigh at hand, the God who has come to us through the medium of our mother tongue; we have seen Him who moulded the stars and set the constellations in their places.

This makes the New Testament a new book to me. Am I told that God is as approachable, as simple, as beautiful in brotherliness or fatherliness as Jesus Christ was? Yes. You cannot see the glory of the Godhead, but you can see the incarnate Deity. But Jesus Christ was so simple and so peasant-like sometimes; Jesus Christ accepted food at our hands; Jesus Christ talked to us now and again as if He were simply our equal: we cannot imagine that God is to be so imaged to the mind. Yes, I think God is as simple and peasant-like and brotherly and motherly, and all that. Who made you speak of the peasant with a lingering sneer in your voice? The peasant was the first man, the so-called king came down by a wrong way a long time after the peasant began; it is the peasant who is ancient, it is the peasant who makes the Plantagenet modern. Yet you must not think of Jesus Christ only as simple and childlike and unostentatious, houseless and almost friendless and breadless. That is one aspect of the Christ, but I tell you that now and again there came a look into the Man's face that frightened us; now and again a tone lighted up the gamut of His voice, and made it like no other voice that was ever heard. You must bring in these elements and qualities if you would represent the Godhead of Jesus Christ in sufficiency of expression and sentiment. Sometimes we could go quite closely to Him and speak to Him as if we were exchanging the salutations of the hour, and in a moment, without notice, He blinded us with lightning, and we stood back and said, What manner of man is this? You must put the two aspects together, if you would acquire and appreciate the totality of the person and priesthood of Jesus Christ.

We are taught that there is a great scheme of providence at work round about us. It is a very mysterious providence; if you look at it in the wrong light, it is so mysterious as to be painful and destructive in its expression and energy. If I would study the providence of God, I would read all that Jesus Christ did. What shall I get from such a perusal of His record? A clear vision of what at present is regarded as the invisible providence. We talk about a providence within a providence; we

speak thus almost atheistically. The providence of God is as plain as the sunlight, as beautiful as the summer landscape. How can we approach it? By studying Jesus Christ; the daily life of Christ was the daily life of God. Then why tear the clouds asunder to see some at present invisible providence? It is needless, it may soon become impious. We need not batter the cloud-door, and say, Admit us to see the machinery of the universe. No need of that; read the life of Jesus Christ, and you will see what God is doing, what God can do, and what God has been doing all the undated and uncalendared ages.

This brings the matter very closely to us. The kingdom of God is amongst us, the kingdom of God is within you. Why stretch your necks to see something beyond the horizon when God Himself is standing in your midst and manifesting Himself in your own flesh? Then we will study Jesus, and see what He thought about the people and about life, and how He sought comfort for all the persons that trusted to Him, how He made the orchards grow and the wheatfields and the vineyards and the yards of olives. That is right; now you are becoming religious.

How does God deal with the poor? Ask Jesus. What does Jesus say? He says to His disciples when they mention the necessities of the people to Him, Give ye them to eat. Yet we are the men who want to know what God does for the poor in His providence! He gives to me that I may give to the man sitting next me. He has made the man sitting next me rich in gold that he may hand some of it over to me. He sets up the great doctrine of mutual interdependence; not the bastard socialism of a card-up-the-sleeve with which some swindler may seek to win the game, but the true socialism and masonry of brotherhood. That is too simple a plan for many persons; they like something more intricate, something that needs to be explained in long and resounding words; whereas God in Christ says to every man who has a loaf, Give some of it to the man who has no bread; I gave you the loaf, not that you might keep it, but that you might distribute it, and I have so arranged the economy of life that dis-

tribution is multiplication, and that whoso gives the bread most freely will be surprised at the last to find that he had more to end with than he had to begin with. Man does not like that kind of providence; he prefers a programme, a demonstration in some London park, howling and shouting and waving red banners—where dyed I know not, but I suspect—to the simplicity of handing over to the man who is needy part of the loaf which God has entrusted to him. I wonder that men, seeing these things, do not stand up and say, Hail Him! crown Him Jesus Lord of all! His plan was so fundamental, vital, impartial, Divine, my wonder is that any man is ashamed of Jesus or turns his back on the sanctuary where His name is worshipped.

What does the invisible and unthinkable God do in the matter of the prodigality and sinfulness of the world? Read Jesus Christ's life and you will get the answer at once. What is God's plan about a lapsed and ruined world? "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost." That is what God is doing all the time; He is seeking and saving the lost; He is keeping the door of His own heart open that the very least and worst of His children may enter in and be saved. But we have theological lectures upon this point. Better not have any such lectures! We have a great scheme of explaining all these mysteries. There is no need for such a scheme. Read the life of Christ; He was God manifest in the flesh; He said, He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. Read His word. What is God doing to-day? Seeking men; saying, Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any hear my voice and open the door I will come in." We have a pleading God, a self-humbling God, a God we keep standing out in the dews of the midnight and amid all its boisterous winds; and we are asking profound or foolish questions about God's method of dealing with the world He made and loved and redeemed.

What is God's relation to so-called sinners, sinners of the baser type also; not respectable and well-dressed sinners who have a dress for the summer day and another kind of dress for the day of snow, and

who have so many meals per day drenched in wine. But what does God do when He meets a sinner of the baser sort? He goes home with him, and if the poorest of the city's women-sinners should ask Him to share her crust He would go and do it, and leave a thousand wheatfields behind Him. We dare not do that because we are, possibly, the worst of sinners. There are most damnable sinners with fine cloaks on and feathers and jewellery, and studs of horses, and betting books and books of prayer and praise all huddled in one wild wardrobe and library. They murmured that He was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. You dare not have gone, because you have a visiting card, and a list of calls, and a very intricate system of hypocrisy and falsehood—call, and do not want to call; hoping that when you leave the grand door some person will observe that you have been inside it, and will respect you for your greatness. Away! that is my Lord who comes out of the sinner's house, rich or poor, who talks to the poor woman and smiles her back into girlhood, and lifts her up into her proper divinity. That is what God does; and we sit smoking and wondering in a cloud about the mysteries of Providence, when there are no such mysteries when properly apprehended, and when we approach them along the line so clearly indicated by the doctrine and by the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. God pities the world; God dies for the world; God dies every day; God sheds His blood from the foundation of the world that He may thus wash out for ever the stain of sin and the taint of crime.

If, therefore, we would see God we must see Jesus. This is the Gospel simplified, and the Gospel definitely applied. I have been adopting now what I believe to be a very proper and wise scheme of philosophy in the interpretation of things. There are two ways along which we may proceed: we may begin with the greater and come down to the less, or we may begin with the less and gradually ascend to the higher. We may begin with eternity and find our way down by broken pieces of duration into so-called time; or we may begin with time and proceed from days to months, from months to years, from years to centuries, from centuries to millenniums, and pile

the millenniums one upon the other, until our arithmetic is dazed and lost; and describe that as the highway to the palace of eternity. We may begin with the invisible, metaphysical, unthinkable Deity, and leave Him in His unspeakable solitude, because we cannot bring Him within the four points of our own intellectual limitation; or we may take the other and better plan, to begin with man, prophet, poet, dreamer, Immanuel, the living Jesus, the great word, the great deed, the marvellous revelation, and so work our way upward to the Ineffable and the Everlasting. That is what I daily try to do. Begin where you can, and proceed with diligent obedience into the further and larger spaces.

What is God's method of judgment? We read of a great white throne, we read of a day of final audit and trial. We need not wonder about that; Jesus Christ has gone through the whole process; if we study Him we know all about it; and the day of judgment may be no longer than one flash of light, than the twinkling of an eye. What is God's plan of judgment as shown by Jesus Christ? He said, Where much is given much will be required; where little is given little will be expected. Where there is poverty and difficulty about doing certain things, yet there sounds this sweet music, She hath done what she could. That is the judgment; that is the day of judgment. Why not judge ourselves now? We need not wait until the after-death judgment: set up the day of judgment now. I have much, do I give much? I have little, do I give out of the little? Do I do what I can? Oh, so small, yet given with a kiss of the heart. Let this Divine revelation come nearer and nearer to us. Let us go to Jesus when we would know about God. Let us study His example when we would apprehend somewhat of Divine metaphysics. With Christ at hand no man need be at a loss for God.

PRAVER.

THOU openest Thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living creature. We are all guests at the table of the Lord, the first archangel and the meanest insect ; we gather around the Lord, for He made us, and by His power only are we sustained. We are one universe, one life ; we would be the glory of the Lord. Enable us, by the ministration of Thy Spirit and the wondrous miracle of Thy grace, to show that we were made in the image and likeness of God. Take away from us all that is merely earthly, purge the gold of all its dross ; relieve us of all that is ungainly and unlovely and undivine ; may the Spirit itself, yea God's own Spirit, witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and may we know this by our pureness and unselfishness, by our modesty and love and service of others ; thus may we reincarnate the Son of God, and show the meaning of the Divine, eternal love. We bless Thee that we have heard the Gospel ; Thou hast proved it in our own experience to be true ; we want no man's argument, we only want the history of our own heart, our joy and sorrow, our sin and trouble, and then we would see the glorious light shed upon the whole mystery of life by the incoming of Him whose name is Immanuel. Deliver us from the narrowness and the bondage of the letter ; save us from the temptation to know everything ; and the Lord deliver us from explanations which men would tender of the infinite counsel and the eternal purpose. We bless Thee for the spiritual forces that are operating upon our souls ; we thank Thee that the old horizon no longer binds us ; by the power of Thy Spirit we see beyond it—new mornings, new kingdoms, new summers. We have been fettered and belittled by the men who would bring everything down to explanation and definition and cold letters cast in iron. Now we have the Spirit, we see now what the blood means, we see now that doctrine is bread and that true bread is doctrine, and that Christ being a door is no figure but a great emancipation, a new and glorious liberty, and by the opening of that door we are welcomed into paradises undreamed in fancy or in love. We do the things we ought not to do, we leave undone the things that we ought to accomplish ; we know it, but we are struggling towards a higher life ; by Thy grace we will be better

to-morrow, and to-morrow, and in that ever-coming time which brings with it the descending kingdom of God. Pity us, we humbly pray Thee, in our littleness and blindness and narrowness; we misjudge one another; we misjudge our Father; we are led away by our own fancies and prejudices and foolish conceits. Let the Lord pity us, for it is the Lord who built the Cross! Amen.

XLVI.

REALITY IN RELIGIOUS INQUIRY.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 8TH, 1899.

"Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?"—JOHN xviii. 34.



THAT makes all the difference in the world. How do we come to ask questions? what is the occasion or the motive of our inquiry? Are we mere gabblers and gossipers, or are we thinkers and students? Do we ask questions which other people have prompted, or do we ask only the questions of our own heart? Here, as ever, Jesus Christ is the teacher and the example. Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus and said unto Him, Art Thou the king of the Jews? Jesus answered him, How did you come to ask this question? have you any real deep interest in the inquiry? or have you only picked up the rumour of the day? does the question come from your tongue or from your heart? tell me that, and I will answer. Thus He sits in His heavens, and every day talks in the same grand frank manner. Jesus does not answer the gossip of the ages, the new attacks that are made upon His name and upon His kingdom, the clever sallies and the bitter sneers He heeds not; but if any soul will come to Him sunk right down in penitence and brokenheartedness, and say, Lord, I want to know what this means; wilt Thou tell me? oh let me lay my weary head for one moment on Thy lap and sob out all that is in my troubled heart!

then Jesus will stay the sun, and the moon shall hang over Ajalon till the great colloquy is complete in the man's redemption. Sayest thou this thing of thyself, Pilate? I shall be so glad if so; then I shall feel the Gentiles are coming to the brightness of my rising, then I shall feel and know that Ethiopia is stretching forth her hands unto God: if this is only an intellectual puzzle, a little trick in curiosity, I will answer in stony silence; if the inquiry comes from a heart that wants something better than it is, then I arrest all processes, and I will talk to thee light!

It is just the same to-day. We could apply the text to all manner of spiritual and religious inquiries and difficulties. I have no interest in the doubter, as he calls himself. A curious word altogether that and made up of a special kind of india-rubber that may be twisted into any shape. If the man is giving expression to his own doubts—I mean his own, own doubts—I will stop with him till overborne by sleep, and will then ask God to deliver me from slumber that I may continue still to talk to the burningly earnest inquirer. There is the difficulty that men come to you with other men's doubts. Away with them! You have read in a halfpenny pamphlet that some man doubted something somewhere, and you want to know what we have to say to it. Nothing! We cannot be refuting the infidelities of the fourth century and the indigestions of yesterday. But if you, dear heart, have a question that really pains your own soul, tell it, let us hear what it is, and on the understanding that it is your own, your very own, we will talk it out. All depends upon that. Only retail your own infidelity, and you will find in the course of conversation how very little of an infidel you are; when you are really thrown down into your own soul to find out what infidelity you hold there you will find an empty cupboard. But if you bring to me all the works of all the heretics that ever lived, and pile these books round about me, and say, Now I give you five minutes to give me an answer to all these things, I will not answer them, and I will not detain you; I am a busy man, and I have not time to entertain hawkers who cart about in a travelling basket some other people's unbelief. But if you are the very

poorest man that ever lived, I will welcome you to the softest chair in my study if you really are going to talk to me out of your own heart, and tell me about your own sin and doubt and fear and perplexity; I will stop the clocks, I would stay the sun, that we might have time to sound the depths of the troublous problems and find some balmy answer to your wounded faith. Have you ever sat down, so to say, with pen in hand just to write out a full account of your own infidelity? It is an interesting exercise, and a very brief one. There is not a man probably in this audience who can infidel over half a page, and even there his writing is full of quotation marks; it is what somebody else believed or disbelieved or troubled about the day before yesterday.

When coming to church only bring your own questions with you; do not trouble with other people's business until your own is settled, and when you have found an answer to your own doubt and fear, then go out and find some other man, and tell him that if he wants the same balm he must go to the same Gilead. This would abbreviate conversation, this would stop many theological reviews; this would do a world of good by first doing a world of mischief amongst the poor petty things that are set up against the incoming of the kingdom of God. Beware of those people who have reduced life to an illegitimate science of explanations. It will be a poor religion that can be explained, a poor little withered, shrivelled sky that you can get under your plaster ceiling. Never imagine that even your house, though so lofty and so richly gilded, can entertain with any adequacy the firmament, the spaces of the stars. Blessed is he who has got beyond the region of explanations in the quiet sunlight and uplands of truest rest and peace—peace in the faith that we are undergoing part of a great process inscrutable and ineffable, and that all we have to do in relation to many of the mysterious outposts of the universe is to let God alone. You cannot put God into a catalogue. No man can exhaust God by explanations. He explain! poor creature, starved hound, born yesterday, seeking for lodgings to-night, and carried out into the grave the day following. And he is

going to explain the universe, and have a rational religion, a measurable piety, an arithmetical dream! Ah me! To know that we cannot know is the beginning of knowledge.

The same inquiry which Christ put to Pilate may be put to our various religious exercises; as, for example, it may be put to the great exercise of what is called preaching. Now what is this preaching? Preacher, you are talking to me—is it out of a book you have borrowed, or out of a soul that has sinned to damnation and been redeemed with the redness of God's heart-blood? is your preaching a recitation or a revelation? is it the latest trick in German text? or is it a sacrifice, great drops of blood-sweat issuing from its mad agony? Preaching will in very deed lose its place and go down, and I will hasten it down, if it be not the supreme effort of the soul. When it is an unburdening of the memory I would call upon the preacher to sit down; when it is an unloading of the heart, the story and the song, the agony and the joy of a deep abysmal experience, I say, God save the preacher and make him strong as a host of men! It is not preaching that is going down in some quarters, it is the want of preaching, it is a mistake as to the true nature of preaching. To hear a human soul tell what it knows of light and darkness, sin and sorrow, penitence and forgiveness, and to hear a great, warm human soul pouring out its experience upon other hearts, *that* can never go down. The essay will be burned, but the Gospel no fire can touch. Sayest thou, then, this thing of thyself, O preaching man, or did some other man tell thee what to say? Do not deliver other men's messages; deliver your own; though it be short, it may be pregnant; though it be poor and stumbling in words, the wise hearer will hear the music inside the stumbling, and will answer it with a great, glowing, loving gratitude.

So, then, we want personal experience, personal testimony, personal affirmation. That was the great power of apostolic preaching. When the Apostle Paul stood up anywhere he always said, Men, brethren, and fathers, I—— It was a right royal egotism, a

magnificent audacity in personality; the man told what he was, what he is, how he came from the was to the is, and it was a great turnpike of facts, personal and well-attested incidents; and so clear, ample, definite was the testimony that before you could disbelieve the argument you must destroy the character of the man. That was preaching, and under it men used to rise from their seats, which they never do now; under such apostolic preaching men were pricked to the heart, and they cried out,—that would be indecorous now. We have run theology into a science, and piety into a decorum. When men want to know the truth because there is a pain in their heart; they will surely get that truth, God will not deny such dumb prayers. He looks down upon all who come to His house, and He says in effect, Here is a man whose very muteness is eloquence; here is a soul whose look is consecration; here is a broken-hearted inquiry, the tears shall be turned into a chrism, the tears shall be turned into waters of baptism and shall fall again in great blessing on the troubled and bleeding heart.

Suppose we could personify some of the Christian doctrines and verities, they would be able to ask of us the very question which Christ asked of Pilate, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? I hear sweet Prayer, describable by my own imagination as the most beauteous of the beauties, an angel of angels, and when she hears someone speaking about prayer, either answered or unanswered, she says,—oh, with what sweetness and subtlety!—Sayest thou this thing of thyself? tell me, hast thou been answered? open the portals of thine heart to me and let me see God's autograph on the tablets of thy soul: or did someone tell it thee of me, saying that I was never answered, that I was only another exercise in breathing, a peculiar effort in vocalisation? did somebody try to trouble thee about me, saying I was never answered and never heeded in heaven? put away all that evil report, and if thou dost come with doubt and difficulty and objection and challenge, come in thine own name and for the sake of thine own soul, and I will talk it out with thee, I will explain what prayer is, how prayer is prayed, upon what range it operates, what singular

answers it secures, how it plucks the lightning from the eternal throne and uses it in the ministries of daily life: but be honest, talk out your own heart to me, and not somebody else's heart: oh, tell me, and I will tell thee, and we shall have a sweet interview. If we could get to such sharp points and issues as these we should soon have a revival of religion, and we should not be long in knowing the mystery of what is meant by growth in grace; all other subjects would sink into insignificance or would fade away to a vanishing point by a rearrangement of spiritual perspective, and when it came to be known that a man without the intervention of a priest could go to God and tell Him even his infidelity and his blasphemy and his impiety, and could tell God the tale of shame, and ask Him at the right place and in the right name to be forgiven, all other subjects would vanish out of sight. There *are* no other subjects; there are divers points of gossip, but subjects, themes that get down to foundations and rise up into the heavens, there are none but this—the relation of the soul to God, and the relation of God to the soul; and all other subjects, if they so miscall themselves, stand back and let spirit talk to spirit. That is the true spiritualism; all other spiritualism is but groping in a decreasing twilight.

If we personify the Bible we shall find the Bible putting the same question to us that Christ put to Pilate. When we praise it, the Bible says, *Dost thou this of thyself, or because it is an old custom in the house? thy grandfather and grandmother dusted me and set me upon uppermost shelves and took me down reverently, and put me back again, and nothing came of it.* You say that the Bible is a good book and full of wisdom and glorious with guiding light; now, sir, wait: sayest thou this thing of thyself? have you read me? have you read the Bible through and through, every word of it? and before giving out any verse in the New Testament have you qualified yourself by graduating in the Old Testament? and do you take the last text you have read as part of an infinite background of history, and do you relate the immediate text to all the revelation that has gone before and to all the open-

ing possibilities that fill the great sky with doors of entrance? Is your Bible a fetish, or a living power? is your notion of the Bible something traditional and superstitious, and a mere repetition of what somebody else has told you to think and believe about it? then you have no Bible, and the very smallest infidel insect can steal from you what you have: there would not be much to take away, the poor little beastie would not be much burdened if he had to carry away all the Bible that you have left in your house; though you dust it and put it under a dome, and are very careful how you refer to it, it is no Bible to you. But if you can say to your soul's soul, I have read it, tasted it, we have been companions night and day these fifty years; it has the answer to every riddle, a balm for every wound, a reply to every wise and profitable inquiry, a song that fits the night and an anthem that fills the summer, I know it,—that testimony I love to hear; we want to hear more about such experience. Alas! the world for the time being has no immediate care for Bible reading; almost anything will do to substitute for the Bible; and men that used to read the Bible so lovingly and so long are now so affected by the spirit of the age that they have barely time to read just one little verse before catching the train or the omnibus to the City to make more money. I do not despair; old fashions come round; evangelical interpretations of the Bible will have their turn next, and it shall come to pass in this City of London that he shall be the most original and powerful preacher who gets back to old Puritan evangelical doctrines of salvation by the blood of Christ. In the meantime the Bible is undergoing divers processes and examinations. I do not know at this moment that I would stop any one of them; I have faith in the Bible, in the revelation of God, in the testimony written and unwritten, harmonious and co-operative, and I believe that all bubbles—blue, beautiful, iris-like bubbles—will round themselves and split themselves and be forgotten; but the Word of the Lord abideth for ever. Young preachers, do not strain to preach to the times, to be abreast with the age, and to borrow expensive magazines that you may quote from more or less benighted and impecunious writers; you stand fast to

the revelation known to us as the Bible, and you will never be wanting in subjects, you will never be less than original, and you cannot be less than poetic, ideal, in the true sense of these terms that indicate the whole range of intellectual possibility.

Now when men went to Jesus He always put to them this question, or He always operated as if He presupposed the individuality and consequent reality of the appeal. Once a man crept into his house by night, and he was detained there until the morning. You may depend upon it Jesus saw in him something worthy of attention. The man was deferential, more than deferential, he was truly reverent, and he said, Master, we know that Thou art a teacher sent from God, for no man can do these miracles—miracles with this peculiar quality and accent, *these* miracles—that Thou doest except God be with him. Miracles that require testimonials are poor miracles, but when men recognise in the miracles their own testimonials, the quality being so rich, and the purpose of their being wrought so beneficent, then there will be a great incoming to see and to testify the wonders and the realities of the kingdom of God. Nicodemus was kept all night; he heard such a sermon as no other man ever heard; the sermon has, blessed be God, been published for the instruction and edification of the world. I wonder how many of us could repeat that sermon by heart? There is no way over that sermon into the blank desert land of infidelity; it is so rich, so utterly comely, so spiritual, so comforting and sustaining; it brings with it such a great light and such a glorious redemption that when it has ceased we wonder that such music should ever come to an end. He who has read the interview of Christ with Nicodemus cannot be an infidel, does not want to be one; he finds in it enough for intellect, heart, imagination, and the immediate claim and responsibility of life.

And once Jesus Christ recognised that a certain person represented to Him individuality, reality of soul and of outlook, and He made His first grand revelation to her by the well's mouth. It was a wondrous time; the disciples had gone away, a

woman whose life was written in her face, written in wrinkles, ciphers that only experts can translate, looked at Christ with a woebegone face; there was a great tragedy in her heart; she mentioned the name Messias, she said that she knew and all knew that when Messias came He would teach them all things. And Jesus looked at her as He never looked at any other person, and He said, I am He. And she knew it, and fled away, and preached it, could not help preaching it; left her waterpot and her Jacob's well to tell some great story of pity and love and thankfulness. Do not imagine that you will get anything from Christ if you come to Him in a mood of curiosity. If you ask Him to sit down and hear you read Hume's argument on the miracles—poor Hume!—as if he could argue about anything under heaven! and if you imagine that you can entertain Christ when you read to Him some of the latest difficulties, and set up before Him the alabaster no-God of rationalism and measurableness of piety, He hath no time, the King's business requireth haste. But say, Lord, hear me, for my heart moans with sorrow and wants to ask Thee a question, and He will sit down, and the King's business will be to liberate you. But do be real, do be personal. Do not carry about with you from door to door some other man's lame, empty, miserable atheism.

PRAAYER.

IF I may but touch the hem of His garment I shall be made whole. Lord, increase our faith ; give us the holy touching power ; may we come into daily, loving, healing contact with the All-Living : then shall we have life in ourselves, and Thy word shall be in us like a well of water springing up to everlasting life ; we shall know the beauty and the music and the gladness of eternal spring. We have come to touch the hem of the Saviour's robe ; we put out our groping fingers towards the Cross ; if our heart's love may but touch it, death will flee away. But we are in great fear and trembling when we remember the penetration of Thy Spirit, Thy Holy Spirit. Thy word itself is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow ; Thine eyes search our hearts ; we cannot hide ourselves from God. If Thou wouldst slumber for one moment we should have another kind of gladness, the gladness which comes of deceiving God and His righteousness ; but Thou dost search Jerusalem as with a candle ; all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do. Thou knowest our thought afar off ; before we have time to be ashamed of it, lo, Thou dost blush over us in the heavens : our thought is so mean, so poor, so deficient, oftentimes so hideous and so cruel. We keep a silent chamber in the heart into which no one is admitted, and out of which we would gladly exclude Thyself if we could. We are bad souls, we are conscious of guilt, we defy the law, but we fear the righteousness, the holiness of God. Pardon our expertness in comparative morals ; comparing ourselves with ourselves, into what foolish delusions we fall ! but setting ourselves against Thine own holiness, behold, who dare open his own eyes on his own deeds ? Grant unto us spiritual criticism, the penetration of holiness, and may we measure ourselves by the standard of God's character, and not by the fickle wand of our own treacherous inconsistency. In Thine house we invoke Thy Spirit ; we would trifle not in the presence of God, we would rebuke ourselves lest we vaunt before God ; ours shall be a penitent spirit and a prostrate attitude, for we are sinners before God, if not before one another. We talk one another into a belief of our mutual respectability, but when we speak to God we cannot see Him for His radiance, and we dare

not ask Him to look upon our holiest attempts. But the blood of Jesus Christ Thy Son cleanseth from all sin. To that blood we come ; to the redemption wrought for us by Christ Jesus we trust ; we venture again and again, in morning light and evening shadows, to look up to God, and say, For Christ's sake, pity us, pardon us, make us good ! Amen.

XLVII.

MOTIVE DETECTED.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 22ND, 1899.

"For he knew that for envy they had delivered Him."—MATT. xxvii. 18.



HE was a Roman, and they were Jews ; but he saw through them. Men are seen through much more than they imagine. Pilate had heard all their hypocritical protestations about Cæsar and loyalty and the high treason of this young Culprit ; Pilate never knew before that the Jews were so fond of Rome ; this was a kind of revelation to Pilate. On this occasion, however, the Jews were the most loyal of Cæsar's subjects ; they hugged their chains, they paid all their taxes and tributes with both hands and with unutterable generosity, and were thankful to have an opportunity of paying homage to the throne of Cæsar. But Pilate saw through them. We are more seen through than we think. Pilate was a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. If we could have heard Pilate speaking his own language, he would have spoken after some such manner as this : Ye hypocrites ! ye detestable people ! you envy this young Man, you are jealous of Him, in some way or other He hurts your pride, and if you could only have Him legally murdered that would satisfy your hellish desire : ye hypocrites ! you talking about Cæsar, and my not being Cæsar's friend ! you beasts of hell ! Pilate knew that for envy they had delivered Him. Only get rid of this Jesus, the pretended King of the Jews, and all would be well,

and it would be worth while to believe any number of lies in order to get rid of Him. We will kiss Cæsar's foot, we will ask Cæsar to redouble his chains, and we will sing Cæsar's praises morning, noon, and night, if we can only get rid of this critical, awful Judge of our lives. Away with Him! anywhere! Oh, how pious they were, and how exceedingly patriotic, and how delightfully subservient! But Pilate saw through them, mocked them in his heart, despised them in his bedchamber, hated the very fall of their feet as they approached him; he saw through the hypocrisy and the bloodthirstiness.

The awful reflection is that men may deceive themselves and put one motive at the front and keep the real motive at the rear; and the self-deception may go to such an extent that if you charged the men with the baser motive they would feel annoyed—they are so sensitive, so honourable. May the Lord deliver us from self-blindness! We make a great pother about colour-blindness; we will not admit a man into army or navy unless he be very quick-sighted as to the distinctions between colours. If we would apply the same criticism to our own motives and our own hearts, we would have revelation enough, and we might even yet be saved. I do not know whether it lies within the compass of the Divine mercy to save envy, jealousy, hatred, that springs out of the heart and that pretends to be justice; I do not deny that God may save the jealous, but I doubt it. Jealousy is never so hideous and never so dangerous as when it denies its own existence. If I could personify envy, which is another name for jealousy, or jealousy, which is another name for envy, I think I could put words into its mouth:—Jealous, indeed! what an insinuation! what is there to be jealous of? I have no need to be jealous of him; what need have I to be jealous of her? What an extraordinary suggestion to make, that *I* am jealous! Then was the devil born in the evil Bethlehem of that heart! Envy says, What is there to envy? you talk about his powers, what are they? you talk about her beauty, what is it? there is nothing to be envious about; if there were anything to be envious about, well, of course, I might be envious, but until there is something to be envious about I must defend myself against the infamous impeachment. Her singing! what is it? His literature! why, the man

can hardly write at all ; he has written a book, but there is no literature in it, it is mere gabble ; his painting ! why, I would not have such a daub in my house ; I do not call it painting. Show me something to be envious about, and then I may perhaps be envious, but until then hold me guiltless. *Then* envy, jealousy, is at its worst. And such miserable disposition is clearly seen through by Pilate and by alien and by stranger and by everybody.

We can easily tell when it is envy or jealousy that is running down a public man or a private character. The people have a spirit of judgment ; trust the people when they have had time to become sober ; they will protect you, and your book, and your singing in the concert hall, and your merchandise, and your family life ; they see through all the attacks that are made upon you ; leave it all to them and to God. Know this—a statement absolutely incredible, if we did not know it to be absolutely factual—that the Son of God was delivered for envy ; jealousy hunted Him to His death. If they did these things to the Lord, will they spare His people ? will the Master be persecuted and the disciple be allowed to go without criticism or hostility ? The point of comfort in this case is that Pilate saw through the Jew, the Roman governor saw through the Jewish tributary. It is a sad thing to know that great searching, clear, righteous eyes are reading us all through and through. Even in the act of listening to us persons may be criticising our statement regarding others. Have you suffered from jealousy ? You are a rising young man, and it is the business of those who are just a little older than you are to put you down. Are you suffering in your little trade and commercial life ? It is the one business of the man who has a shop twelve inches wider than yours to buy you up, to sneer at you, and to wonder what you have come there for—not that he is envious or jealous ! he is a most magnanimous man, if lies are true. Are you a young artist in painting, in music, in literature ? it is the business of those people on the other side of the curtain to depreciate you. Some of the more skilful of them are very excellent ; they depreciate you by praising you ; they know the stopping-places, they know the gradations of verbal colour, they know the mystery of moral emphasis. The wrestler lifts

his opponent a few inches in the air that he may the more surely dash him to the ground. The mischief is that you never in your life met a man who confessed to jealousy. That is the woe of it; that is where the murder blushes into its guilty redness: because the man or woman charged with jealousy says, What is there to be jealous about? that is what I want to know. Thus the devil comes of age and claims his right over the human heart. Beware! resist beginnings. I have never known a jealous person saved; I do not deny the salvation of persons who are jealous, but I have never known it: that I give as a personal testimony.

Now see what envy or jealousy or hatred of the heart will do by studying the case of Jesus Christ. What did these people seek to get rid of? They sought to repulse the gentle advances of mercy. Mercy is the name of the Son of God, mercy was the purpose of His heart. He came to seek and to save that which was lost; He came to bind up the broken-hearted, to give joy to the joyless, and to set the captive free. But He did not come in the conventional way; He did not come from the expected place; He did not bring with Him what were deemed orthodox credentials; so He and His Gospel, His mercy, His love, His pity were cast away; herein is that saying true, He was despised and rejected of men. See what envy will do; see what doors it will close, see what light it will quench, see what opportunities it will abuse. And, rejecting Christ, the people rejected His discipline. Jesus was a disciplinarian.

Want of discipline is killing England to-day; it is altering commerce, trade of all kinds, occupations of all sorts; it is eating out all family veneration, all social reverence, and is asserting self above law and right, above decency and social beauty. The great disease that is eating up England, and will finally destroy it, is want of discipline, order, obedience, punctuality, decorum, self-restraint. Want of discipline now discloses itself on the public streets; every thoroughfare may be said to be placarded with lack of discipline--every man doing just what he likes in his own eyes, coming at his own time, going at his own time, doing what pleases himself, and mixing up engagements and enjoyments that ought to be inconsistent with the daily observance

of decent life. The Gospel cannot be popular ; it will take a millennium multiplied by itself to give the Gospel any substantial foothold in what are called the economic and the practical departments of life ; because men do not like discipline : whereas the Gospel has but one time, *Now* ; one duty, *Go* ; one reward, enduring to the end means the final crown. But we have lost our pith, our sinews ; we are athletics in the joints and paralytics in the nerves of the soul ; great jumpers, poor soldiers ; great at running when nobody wants you to run, poor at standing still and keeping the fort. Until the spirit of discipline gets back I have no hope of family unity, of business integrity, of national prosperity, of world-wide evangelisation. The children on the streets have now taken to tricks and practices that would not have been allowed for a moment a century ago when England was younger, not older, than she is to-day. When people rejected Christ they rejected the sense of responsibility ; they did not like to be called to account : and Christianity is the religion of responsibility ; that is, of accounting for itself, accounting for the expenditure of its time and the expenditure of its money, and the outgoing of its energy and its influence. Christianity and responsibility are to a large degree interchangeable terms. Where is thy brother ? What have I to do with my brother ? Everything. Where art thou ? To whom have I to give an account of my retreat, of my privacy and solitude ? To God.

X This is not likely to be a popular Gospel. There will be more people at the country fair where the clown thrusts his head through a hoop than there will be at the church festival of sacrifice and responsibility and oath-taking as to better life and better deed. It is apparently pleasanter to be at the fair—there, that is the drum, that the band—away ! Ah me ! these people will never do any good for their country ; they may be conscripts some day, but willing patriotic soldiers, never ! it is not in their nature, it is not in their blood.

Of course responsibility means that Christians are to incarnate Christ. He is to be incarnated in every man who believes in Him and gives his heart to Him. Thus we are to be in the world in our poor degree just as Christ was. When we read our marching orders and

our orders of discipline it is very hard reading :—When He was reviled, He reviled not again ; when He suffered, He threatened not ; He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that pluck off the hair. And what have we to do ? Read your orders :—Love your enemies, pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you : if thine enemy smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also. Pilate, crucify Him ! His blood be on us and on our children ; we cannot have this ; life would not be worth living under such law : crucify Him ! crucify Him ! He hurts our pride, He disestablishes our pomp and our houses and our great ancestral delights and honours ; He plucks all our decorations from us, and sets us out stark naked under the burning mid-day sun : Pilate, crucify Him ! prove thyself Cæsar's friend ! We cannot alter the law, we cannot alter the morality of the Gospel, we cannot accommodate Christian requirements to human prejudices. When the great Christian criticism ploughs its way through our life, we hate it, it tells us we are all descendants of one father, a sinful man ; and we want to fix our genealogy where we like, going seven centuries before the first century if possible, and to say we were born then, and we were the only inhabitants of the universe for two million ages ; that would suit us. But Jesus traces us all to one root, to one parentage, and He includes us all in one condemnation ; and His great universal, unqualified cry is, Repent ! If He had gone down to the slums and out-of-the-way quarters of the city we would gladly have subscribed a trifle to any little home mission in which He was foolish enough to engage Himself. When He stands at the centre of things and directs His inclusive glance upon all the generations, all the evolutions of human life, and cries with thunderous voice, Repent !—Pilate, crucify Him !

Men do not always disclose the real motives under which they operate. I return to that point to make it more emphatic. We may give one motive to the public and keep the real motive in our heart. In every heart there is a chamber of imagery, a hidden place where we keep the idols, the unclean pictures, and in which we enjoy without suspicion on the part of the public the unholy revel. While we are in the church

we may be in some house of ill-fame ; whilst we are singing out of the hymn-book or joining the public anthem we may be revelling in the bed of lust. We want a searching light, a penetrating criticism ; we want, indeed, to be revealed to ourselves. Self-deception, I repeat, is the worst of all deceptions. And as for our glibness and expertness in substituting one motive for another to suit the public exigency or the private contingency, then, alas ! is salvation possible ? I have known a man leave the church because he could no longer profit by the preaching of the pastor—poor wounded soul, sensitive creature, he could no longer be edified by the preaching which once built him up ; and the poor weak-kneed creatures that are in every church got around him and sympathised with him, and petted him and treated him to divers sorts of impious confectionery, and hoped that by patience and forbearance he might one day be restored and take up his old delights. All the time the villain was making a subterranean passage through which he could escape from a charge of falsification of accounts, malfeasance in commerce, and he was lacerating his poor pastor, and bringing him into sore mental straits under the pretence that he no longer profited, when—blessed be God!—he was weaving a rope for his own neck, and he was hanged as one who had wounded society. In the meantime, what some men may have to suffer on account of others ! and these poor weak-kneed creatures that somehow get into every Christian community—I would that all the windows were barred that they could not get in!—all get round this poor creature, whose soul is drooping down for want of the food which he once enjoyed and for which he was once thankful. Pilate would have seen through him ; Pilate had the critic's eye ; he saw the hypocrite in the pretended patriots that were around him.

Then let us go to the other side for one bright moment. Jesus Christ knows when we are doing our best to quench the evil ; He listens nightly to our prayers which we dare not pray at the family altar, saying, Lord Jesus, I did it for envy, I did it for jealousy, and this cruel devil in my heart is eating my very life out and telling me that I have nothing to be envious about or jealous about ; but I know better, I know

that I am doing this for envy, and I am self-tormented by my jealousy, for jealousy torments all its victims; I dare not tell my father, my mother, my dearest one about it, but in reality this devil jealousy is drinking my blood and killing my human nature, and is poisoning me against Thyself, and is telling me to give up praying and take to revelling: let me put my arms round Thy feet, Thou Son of Mary, Son of God, and help me: Thou knowest what envy did in Thine own case; Thou knowest what it is doing in my heart, in relation to other men better infinitely than I have ever been: come to me this night in this darkness and cast out the devil! On such a scene the morning shall arise and the spring shall break, and transgression shall be rolled as a thick cloud and cast for ever behind the Lord! Behind the Lord, behind the Infinite, where is that? It is there our transgressions are cast by our loving Lord, in the degree in which we kiss His five wounds with the lips of our heart, and in the degree in which we make those five wounds five starting-places under the providence of the Holy Spirit towards a new life and a final heaven.

PRAYER.

ALmighty GOD, we thank Thee with all our love for the gift of Thy dear Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. To us He is Emmanuel, He is God manifest in the flesh, He is Thyself made visible. We heard Him say, and our souls delighted in the saying, He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. Yet men saw Him with the bodily eyes and crucified Him ; may we have the heart-vision, eyes of the soul ; blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Enable us to look, therefore, with the attention of our souls, that nothing may escape us of the Lord's condescending revelation and perpetual beauty. Open our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of Thy law ; open our understanding that we may understand the Scriptures ; bring us away from the market place where we have been idling too long, and give us work to do in Thy vineyard or in Thine house. We would have God for Master, we would obey the Lord, we would be fellow-workers with God, we would be of His husbandry and of His household. Enable us to work while it is called day ; may we waste no daylight, may we work even into the night-time ; so urgent and so desirous should we be to do something for Him who gave His life for us. The Lord be with all godly workers, with all missionaries, teachers, evangelists, with all who work in the field of home missions, on their own hearthstone, under their own roof-tree ; and thus the Lord send upon us the spirit of consecration, that we may be strong souls, given in the power of the Cross and by the oath of love to the service of the Son of God. Amen.

XLVIII.

DAILY SERVICE.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 26TH, 1899.

"As every day's work required."--I CHRON. xvi. 37.



THAT was the law. "So he left there before the ark of the covenant of the Lord Asaph and his brethren, to minister before the ark continually, as every day's work required." Not as yesterday's work required, not as to-morrow's work might require, but as every day's work required within its own twelve hours or twenty-four. That was order. The men had been singing. A musical man cannot be disorderly; he would refute his own song, he would annihilate his own music. "As every day's work required"—morning by morning; now much, now more; now not quite so much; now a little variety; but every day had its duty; every morning had its opportunity. That is the secret of success. For want of knowing such a secret and applying it many men are without bread to-day; honest men, well-meaning men, but without faculty, without conscience that is well disciplined; the intention is perfectly good, the conscience is not faulty, except in the particular that the conscience is not ruled by the conscience. Here is a great subject for a great City lecture; here might be compiled a manual for young men, for merchants, for ministers, for house-keepers. There is infinitely more in the text than there seems to be. So there was in every saying of Jesus Christ; you could not fathom the wisdom of the Speaker. If we could obey any one thing that Jesus Christ ever gave us to do, we should be saved, and the world would be arrested, contented, and happy. He said, Let your Yea be yea. The world will not, and therefore the world is torn by a restless demon. The Lord Christ said, Let your Nay be nay. But the world will not. If the world would let Nay be nay,

or Yea be yea, the world would be saved ; but it will have rearrangements, modifications, covenants that are reserved ; it will have a speech that is qualified by mental reservation ; it will have ornaments and sacraments that are modified by unspoken and to us unintelligible intention. We have often said that he who really and truly values a blade of grass must pray ; and so we say, he that obeys anyone of the ethical laws of Jesus Christ must be plunged in the fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins. The whole creation is a unity ; life is a sublime integrity ; herein is that saying true, He that breaks one breaks all ; he that is obedient in one is obedient in all. You cannot split up the commandments and the ethics of the Lord and his Christ into little detached isolations and make pets and toys of the Lord's great inclusive and eternal word.

“As every day's work required.” There is only one time—Now “Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” Now is God's great opportunity given to us all. Yesterday is gone, to-morrow is unborn, to-day is now, and the golden portal rolls back to let us into the larger liberty. Things are not to be done at any time. That is where so many people go into confusion and into final bankruptcy, and spend their days at the public expense, and complain that it is very hard to go to the workhouse at the last. There is no need for any man to go to the workhouse ; if every man will do as every day's work requires, he need never bend his head under the doorway of a workhouse. To so many people there is no regular time ; that is the reason of failure, that is the leak. They were going to do this, but they forgot. What ! a man forgetting ? He was going to do this at ten o'clock, but he was busy at that moment, and now he will do it in the afternoon. I do not read of any provision made for such people ; and when they go to the workhouse with a heavy heart and a long-drawn sigh the last thing they would ever think of doing is to blame themselves ; they would blame their relations, and they would blame the Government of the day, and they would blame people not yet born, so absurd and ridiculous and unjust is the spirit of those people who break the law of time and violate

the discipline of responsibility. Never ask if you can do this to-morrow; no man has a right to promise you that liberty. Will it do if I attend to it after supper? Where is that man going? To the work-house. The great secret of successful life is discipline, promptitude, military obedience—now! altogether! the best I can; as every day requires.

That was the way that Jesus Christ lived. In that apparently coldly ethical doctrine there is a great evangelical gospel; the Son of God is hidden in that disciplinary prose:—I must work the works of Him that sent Me: are there not twelve hours in the day? I must work while the light lasts; the night cometh wherein no man can work: I must not postpone Monday's duties to be done in Tuesday's light. That is success, mastery; he who obeys that rule is king, no man can take his crown. It is the little man fussily doing nothing that comes to disappointment, confusion, and pennilessness. There is a daily sacrament of work. I must do my allotted work in this allotted time. How is it possible for you to do so much? we say to this great king of labour, and that great leader of civilisation; and he makes answer, Only by doing the day's work within the day. I must have my chapter a day, and there is no bed for me until the last verse of that chapter is read and understood. There are a great many persons who have out-of-the-way places in which they store things to be attended to some time; the fact being that there is no peace in that household, no music, no deep content; there is always something tugging at the conscience and reminding the memory of the arrears. Never have any arrears; keep abreast with your duties, and let who likes keep abreast with the times—those great, gigantic, immeasurable ciphers who always keep abreast with the times in things that do not concern them and let their own homes and their own business go to waste. Is that the Gospel? Yes! That was Christ's rule, and he that obeys in one obeys in all—must do it, or his soul would be ill at ease till he had struck the last blow due on the day's responsibility.

What does a well-spent day mean? It means

Sabbath every night, satisfaction ; it is finished, it is enough ; I have told my tale, I have woven my thread, there is nothing more to be done to-day ; then comes the sleep of the labouring man, and that is sweet. The lazy man cannot sleep, he can only snore. Only he who works, works for God, with God, in the spirit of Christ, can sleep, and God will make up all that is due to him whilst he is sleeping. The Authorised Version reads, "He giveth His beloved sleep" : better read, "He giveth His beloved sleeping" : whilst the hard worker is sleeping the angels are doing things for him, and he will find the morning beautiful with a large door of opportunity set before him and a day's store of grace prepared for his nourishment and comfort. God giveth to His beloved when they are sleeping ; He says, in effect, Now what are the little knots that puzzle My beloved ? and He sends the angels to disentangle them ; and the sleeper on waking says, I see it now ! The Lord says, Now what is the burden that is crushing his dear, loving, loyal heart ? and He sends the angels to take the load away, so that on recovering consciousness after dreamless sleep he, the Christian believer, says, I feel that I am able to go forth as a giant whom God has refreshed. So many things are done for us in sleep. If even the burden remains the strength has been increased, so that the burden ceases to be a weight. It is God's way. There is morality in sleep. Some men have no right to sleep. And they who have worked well shall sleep on the Father's bosom, they shall not know when fear cometh. I must work the works of Him that sent me, I must work while it is called day ; the night cometh wherein no man can work. But even God has a church of darkness, a church of sleep, a temple of restfulness, of vision, of slumber, and the stars can talk as well as the burning midday sun.

Secondly. Let us enlarge the meaning of the word "day." The term day is one of the most flexible terms in Holy Scripture, in poetry, and in general experience. "In six days the Lord made heaven and earth." I have no doubt of it ; but I do not know what "day" means. We speak of "our day" : does it mean from eight o'clock in the morning until eight

o'clock in the evening? is the word "day" there a term of clock-time, or does it relate to centuries, eras, epochs? We say, "Our little systems have their day": does that mean a chronometer day? or a larger and variable period? Evidently it means the latter. So the text may be expanded without a change of word. "As every day's work required,"—as the time needed, as the exigency demanded, as the epoch called for, as the century required. You are fully aware that every day, in the larger sense of age, epoch, or era, has its own peculiar revelation and its own peculiar truth and special and even unique duty and obligation. We cannot go back upon the centuries and fit the expired aeons into the framework of the immediate day in which we are breathing. So with Truth in its forms—creedal, ecclesiastical; we cannot be taking yesterday and fitting it into this day,—meaning by yesterday not twenty-four hours ago, but a thousand years since. Every age-day has its own work which must be done within its own limits. The apostle did not hesitate to speak of "the present truth," the truth of this particular day, with all its thrill and pulse and feverishness; the present truth, precisely adapted and suited to the immediate intellectual and spiritual condition of the times. We often say that our fathers would preach differently if they could be replaced in the pulpit to-day. Differently they might preach, but in the degree in which they were prophets of God, rich with insight into spiritual mystery and verity, they would make their sermon for the age, and not for an age that expired long ago. Speak to those who are present; do not address the antiquities, and only use antiquity in the degree in which it can be spiritually and profitably modernised. Thus the eternal is brought into the present moment, and we know that we are not cut off from the provinces and continents and globes of eternity because we have an immediate truth with a special, unique, and it may be temporary application.

We read of men who fell asleep after serving their generation—"and having served his generation, he fell on sleep." And he serves the next generation best who serves the present generation well.

Your influence will not be cut off, it will run on when you are no longer visible ; it will be a memory, an inspiration, an enthusiasm, an ever-recurring poem, lifting life's prose into nobler music. We must catch the very spirit and genius of the time ; our question should be, What will the people hear ? not in any grovelling or degrading sense, but, What is the supreme necessity of the human heart just at this hot moment ? Shall we preach to the English people in Latin ? No. Shall we deliver to them terms which are so archaic as to be utterly without immediate meaning to their panting and needy souls ? No. We must show them that the old Gospel, old as the love of God, is adapted to this very moment and can take upon itself the hue and complexion of the transient time. There is no need to fear the resources of eternity. We may have to re-mould testimonies in a new form. We have translation after translation of the written word. No translator can do final justice to the Scriptures. The Scriptures are more than grammar. Grammar is often a very inadequate and disappointing tool to work with ; we must get within the grammar ; that is, at the very soul of things, and the most modern application of that soul to this day's necessity and obligation. So we do not want verbal translations, but spiritual transubstantiation ; as we have said in another discourse, a carrying on of all the meaning as to its substance and purpose from age to age and from land to land, so long as man lives and the Cross stands the hope of the world.

What is it, then, that covers and sanctifies all days ? —the little day of twenty-four hours or twelve, and the great day of long centuries and piled millenniums ? That permanent and all-sovereign quantity or force is Jesus Christ. It is said of Him, He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ; He describes Himself as He that is and was and is to come—Alpha, new as the dawn ; Omega, venerable as the sunset of millenniums. He abides in the Church ; He is ever on the throne, He gives the order of the day, He has a message for every morning. If we could lay hold of that great truth we should have a united Church at once. In fact, the Church is united in its soul, in

its innermost, in its deepest purpose. It is when the Church begins to arrange things and to dress itself and to publish small editions full of various readings—for all of which I could find an ample space in the waste-paper basket—it is then that the Church is apparently divided. What is it that endures? It is Christ; it is not ecclesiasticism, it is not forms, it is not a series of scaffoldings and frameworks. What we, therefore, should be anxious to get at is the internal and unchangeable quantity, the warm heart, the radiant face of the Son of God. Of course we shall always have little creatures, if I may personify them by taking wide grammatical licence, called Opinions and Views. One of Dr. Vaughan's sweetest sermons—I mean the great Dean, the illustrious Master of the Temple, who has been with us in our Thursday morning service—is upon Views; as who should say, My view, His view, Her view, Their view. And the whole of them may be dead to-morrow morning! We do not want your view, and you do not want my view; I was born yesterday, and I almost hope to die to-night, and therefore to trouble you with my view would be impertinence. We want the Christ, the Cross, the blood, the atoning priesthood; these abide for ever, and views and hypotheses—I was most thankful for the idea of cremation when I heard of somebody's views—the little creature that was measured for a suit yesterday and will be measured for a shroud to-morrow. Some persons apparently imagine that they are only singing right when they are singing out of a particular hymn-book. If Christians would only believe that it is not the hymn-book we want, but the praise, the song, the eternal music, we should get liberated from a thousand bigotries, and should be the richer for our deprivation of a thousand superstitions. Now it is not by theology, but by religion, spiritual religion, that we truly live. It is not by the letter, for even the letter of the Bible, if separated from the spirit, may be grievously misunderstood and most mischievously applied. When I read the Bible I must say to the Writer of it, Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law! I do not want the iron-bound letter, I want the ever-living, all-sanctifying Spirit; not the alphabet, but the power is what I am

in quest of when I shut myself up with my God and His Book.

So much for working on the broader scale ; so much for working within day, meaning century, age, epoch. We are not all working in the same way or all doing precisely the same kind of work. If the Church would but believe this she might have summer all the year round. We will compare one man with another ; it would seem as if there were no escape from this lunacy. We think that unless a man shall begin where we expect him to begin, and continue as we expect him to continue, and conclude as we expect he will conclude, that such man is wrong. Never forget that that man could criticise you if he thought it worth while to stoop so low. It would seem to be supposed that only one party can criticise ; it is a miserable, profitless little game that all parties can be experts in if they please. Every man in his own order. The greatest sermon I ever heard in my life was preached by a Roman Catholic priest in the city of Montreal. When I go away from home it is to hear other people and visit other churches, and to know somewhat of the extent and variety of the kingdom of heaven. I would God we could hear all preachers and read all manner of books ! The wider, the brighter the mind, the deeper, the sweeter the charity.

Day—day—day—in its usual sense it means so short a space of time. Take short views of life. Mayhap I am speaking to someone who is worrying himself about the day after to-morrow. Where is that day ? who has seen it ? what will it be like ? who told you about it ? what rights have you in it ? To-day is thy limitation. He who works well to-day shall have holiday to-morrow—holiday in the sense of renewed strength, increased vigour, and power to deal with the problems and handle the difficulties of life. You are wondering who will live in your house two years after you are dead. Why should you trouble yourself about two years after ? You will not be there to see, why trouble about it now ? Use your house well whilst you are in it, make every corner of it holy with prayer, make every part of it sweet with

the breath of charity ; so that when the people come to your house after you have gone they will say, I know there is a blessing in these walls, I feel it ; it may be superstition, but it is a good sort of superstition ; I know good, sweet, honest, high-minded people have lived under this roof, and I am getting the advantage of their having been here. So live, and thou shalt be blessed. Do not turn to-morrow into an enemy ; you have enemies enough, without turning to-morrow into another hostile force. To-morrow is with God ; to-morrow is lingering by the lakes of heaven ; to-morrow has not yet left the eternal throne. Why fret and worry and tear thyself about to-morrow ? It may be the brightest day that ever shone upon thee ; and if thou wouldst make it so, to-day be up and doing, and to-morrow thou shalt have joy in thy Lord.

It is not forbidden to us to dwell for a moment on the past. I often live in the past. My Gospel is in the past, the Cross is in the past, all sweet providences are in the past. I will think of Him who took me up and led me by a way that I knew not ; I will recall all the friends that have brought me roses and gifts of fruit from God's own vineyard ; I will think of all the songs, the true music, the sweet hymns that helped to make me what I am when I am my best ; I will bind the psalms around me as men wear chains of gold, and I will think of the Lord's doing ; and thus I shall not be too lonely, thus I shall be saved from uttermost despair. And when I go to the sanctuary of darkness night by night I will hear a sweet voice teaching me this little song :—

His love in time past
Forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last
In trouble to sink.

Yesterday is my Sanctuary—to-morrow my Hope.

WORDS FOR PREACHERS.

Ministers must often enter into this meditation with themselves, that they are as actors upon a stage, or as beacons set upon a hill to give light to others. They are seen afar off, and a little blemish is soon espied in their coats. Everything that they speak or do is observed and marked.—*Attersol* 1618.

Take heed to yourselves also, because there are many eyes upon you, and therefore there will be many observers of your falls. You cannot miscarry but the world will ring of it. The eclipses of the sun by day-time are seldom without witnesses. If you take yourselves for the lights of the churches, you may well expect that men's eyes should be upon you. If other men may sin without observation, so cannot you. And you should thankfully consider how great a mercy is this, that you have so many eyes to watch over you and so many ready to tell you of your faults, and so have greater helps than others, at least for the restraining of your sin.—*Baxter*, 1615-1691.

Knowledge is so fundamental to the work and calling of a minister, that he cannot be without it: "*Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no Priest to me*" (Hosea iv. 6). The want of knowledge in a minister is such a defect as cannot be supplied by anything else; be he never so meek, patient, bountiful, unblameable, if he hath not skill to divide the word aright, he is not cut out for a minister. Everything is good, as it is good for the end it is appointed to; a knife, though it hath a haft of diamonds, yet if it will not cut 'tis no knife. A bell, if not sound, is no bell. The great work of a minister is to teach others, his lips are to preserve knowledge, he should be as conversant in the things of God, as others in their particular trades. Ministers are called lights; if the light then be darkness, how great is the darkness of that people like to be! I know these stars in Christ's hands are not all of the same magnitude; there is a greater glory of gift and graces shines in some than others; yet so much light is necessary to every minister as was in the star the wise men saw at Christ's birth; to be able out of the word to direct sinners the safe and true way to Christ and Salvation. O, sirs, it is a sad way of getting a living by killing of men, as some unskilful physicians do; but much more to get a temporal livelihood by ruining souls through our ignorance. He is a cruel man to the poor passengers, who will undertake to be pilot, when he never so much as learnt his compass.—*Gurnall*, 1617-1679.

PRAYER.

IF we may but speak unto the Lord for one moment our souls shall be lightened of many a burden and our life will lie before us as a plain path. We have come into Thine house in the name of Jesus Christ our Blessed One, our infinite and only Saviour, in the hope that our hearts may catch some glimpse of God. All things weary us, they exhaust themselves ; the time-vessel is emptied, and behold, there is nothing remaining to refresh and encourage the soul. The things that are eternal can alone comfort us, because of our own quality ; they bring with them messages from the hills of heaven and from the chambers of eternity. We want to hear the ineffable music, we lay open our souls that they may receive the morning gospel from the morning heaven. We thank Thee for Thy great goodness, continual, increasing, multitudinous ; we cannot number Thy mercies, they are more in number than the sands upon the seashore ; we cannot count up all Thy goodnesses towards us, for they are greater in multitude than are the stars. So we will sing of Thy mercies, our song shall be of mercy and judgment ; unto Thee, O Lord, will we sing, and we will say of Thy mercy that it endureth for ever. We thank Thee for the use of great words, such as for ever, eternal, everlasting ; these words belong to our souls ; if we have lost them it is by self-impoverishment, our sins have kept good things from us, and have stood between our souls and our inheritance in God. Oh that we had hearkened unto Thy commandments ! oh that we had been obedient children ! then had we reaped the harvest of obedience, and our barns would have been too poor and small to hold all the largess of Thine answering love. We have done things we ought not to have done, but we would remember this no more, because in Christ Jesus Thou hast Thyself ceased to remember it. Where sin abounds grace doth much more abound ; we will think of the grace rather than of the sin, we will see the Cross of Christ triumphing over all the destruction of the enemy. May our souls never lose sight of the Cross, may that great radiant image raise itself through all the sevenfold night of darkness and misery and shine upon us an infinite hope. We have but a few days to live, our breath is in our nostrils ; whilst we do live in sight of one another may we be kind, gracious, charitable, all-

hoping, all-forgiving ; may no root of bitterness spring up to trouble us, may we spend our little time together in increasing joy, in deepening confidence, and in brightening hope. This day we would in Thy name, O Christ, renounce all evil, we would recall every bitter word, we would withdraw every hotly spoken accusation against good men, and we would humble ourselves before the Cross that through its blood we may be forgiven.

Let the Lord hear us in these things, and remember that our breath is in our nostrils, and that we fly with sinking sins to our little grave, and may His love abound over our sins, and give us light at eventide. Amen.

XLIX.

TO THE EPHESIANS.

CHAPTER II.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 29TH, 1899.



WOULD like to read to you in the second chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. Would you like to hear the reading? We must stop now and then to modernise and apply the deep sweet meaning.

The Apostle Paul is not always just the same. He is consistent, but never monotonous. He is a seven-fold man ; his epistles are his truest photograph. Have you ever read the epistles in the light of that suggestion ?—not only to find out what the epistles are, but what their author was. He never wearies us, because he has a great gift of escaping monotony. He is rugged, incoherent, sometimes almost verbally self-contradictory ; he is full of parentheses, he makes great use of bracketings and asides and literary diversions, yet all the while there is a wholeness which eyes that love him can perfectly discern. In some epistles he is argumentative, almost contentious ; he is pushing a point upon the attention of his correspondents, and he wants to establish a plea. He is not so

enjoyable in such epistles. He sometimes elicits pity for the other man. He is heroic in his logic and destructive in his conclusions; then I sometimes prefer to turn over a page. To the Colossians, the Ephesians, he is as it were in another sense more vividly and tenderly and approachably the Apostle of the grace of God. In the Galatians he talks to the Galatians; in the Corinthians he talks to the Corinthians; they have their local disputes and matters to adjust and to determine. But to the Ephesians and the Colossians he speaks universals, he reveals solar systems; his strides are constellations; they are infinitely wondrous in intellectual conception, in imaginative and ideal colour and emphasis--catholic epistles in very deed; addressed to one church; but meant for all men and all ages.

We need such epistles many a time in traversing the hills and the dales of life. There are times when we are impatient with special messages to special people, with letters of explanation and contention; we want something more, we feel as if we could receive all the sunshine and breathe all the air and accommodate all the sparkling, flashing fountains of living water. When we are in such spiritual mood we find all we want in the great father-mother-brother-sister letters to the Ephesians and to the Colossians. It would be the soul's fortune in the sterling gold of heaven if our memories could charge themselves with all the philosophy, theology, and poetry of the two epistles to the Colossians and to the Ephesians. They are great banqueting-tables; if we change the figure, they are great highland scenes with wondrous panoramas of light and colour and mystery and consolation. There are, I repeat, times when we need every word of them, times when we need the whole Godhead, for we are poor, alone, and sad, and lost, and God Himself is hardly enough to satisfy the creature He has created. Who knows the epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians? He who knows them has bread to eat that the world knows not of. Yet these very epistles, so deep in their theology, so wide in their outlook, so piercing in their appeals, are full of ethical teaching and moral reminiscence and penetrating rebuke. Paul preached a full-orbed Gospel;

he went around the entire circle of Divine thought in so far as it is revealed to human imagination.

Take the first verse as an example:

“And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.”

That verse is theology in one sentence; you need no more. As we found in Genesis i. 1 all the Bible, so we find in Ephesians ii. 1, the whole scheme of God and the whole revelation of human history. You—dead, quickened; you alive, brought from the dead. There are moral resurrections as well as physical. How we boggle over some poor little miracle in bodily resurrection, and forget the infinitely grander and greater miracle of spiritual resurrection—the awakening of the soul, the calling-back of strange thoughts, whispering into the ear of moral death, blowing some silver trumpet over the grave of conscience, and awakening conscience to newness of life. But it is the trick of man to worry himself over the lowest points of things, to make a great stir about minor quantities and subsidiary agencies and applications; it is the nature of the creature when he is left to himself. He is greatly excited about the coming-again of a poor body that is not worth while bringing back from the dust, but he passes over in silence the bringing-back of a dead soul, the quickening of an inspired conscience, the reconstruction of a moral temple: that he cares not for. He says, “With what body will the dead come?” Poor worrying creature! always wasting himself at the wrong points and waiting midnight after midnight at the wrong door. If God has quickened man He will see to all the rest. Recall our lessons upon words that teach by implication. We have seen that created means provided; that provided means redeemed; that redeemed means ultimate sanctification and perfectness of manhood. So with the word “quickened”; it carries all the other evolution along with it; the oak is in the acorn.

“Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Verse 2).

There is the world for you in one gloomy sentence.

This is Paul's reading of moral history. Paul was no fancy lecturer; Paul did not write out a course of dreams and call them a course of lectures: Paul recognised that the air is full of the devil. The devil has hardly left room for the summer in all that air which he breathes and poisons. He would edge out the summer if he could; he tempts the spring; he says to that sweet young thing, the vernal spirit, Blight, O blossoms! Arise, O East Wind, and kill the buds! choke those little birds in their homely nests! It is the devil. Do not attempt to argue him out of existence. Some people try to argue him into existence; they have a devil on paper and in the middle of a sealed creed which they feel themselves to be at liberty to take into the Court of Chancery to have the deed grammatically interpreted by a man who is learned in the analysis of letters. But the Apostle Paul assumed the devil, revealed him, declared him, took him into account, lectured upon him, defied him, sometimes was rebuffed by him—"Satan hath hindered us." There is probably no way of getting the idea so thoroughly into our dense minds as by representing the air, the whole atmosphere, as in some mysterious and inexplicable sense the sphere of the devil's ministry. You can for yourselves see what difficulty the sun has with the atmosphere, the fog, the rain, the east wind, the sea tormented, the crops blighted, the fields naked when they should be clothed with verdure. All this is but for a time. Never undervalue the enemy; never underestimate his resources; take it for granted that, whether you are fighting spiritually or physically, you have a great enemy to meet, and prepare yourselves accordingly, or you will lose the battle, and you will deserve to lose it.

"Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Verse 3).

That is not modern talk. We have schooled ourselves by false schooling out of these great solemn, bedrock verities. The apostle never would have suffered for our poor superficial theories; the apostle would not have endured suffering and gloried in

tribulation because he had received into his fancy some cobweb theory of creation, its evolution and its destiny. Not for such things did men preach in sorrow and seal in blood. If we have little conceptions about man and God, we shall have a little crumbling church, always at war with itself, and always losing the sham fights which it challenges and invites. Marvellous master was Paul! What deftness! what magnanimity! what wondrous subtlety of persuasiveness! "We all had our conversation." This is no pedantic priest coming with ferrule or rod to scourge some minor generation of men; this is a brother soul, this is a kindred experience: I know it, I have suffered it, I recall the darkness, I remember the mercy. It is preaching of Paul's kind that will reconstruct the Church. The Church of Christ does not need reform. We have chosen that little milk-and-water word, and we carry it about with us as a kind of evening-party trick or toy. We say, This or That must be reformed. Jesus Christ never said so; He did not like diluted terms; He never spake a pale hesitant language into which you could thrust a thousand qualifying parentheses. He said, Repent! ye must be born again: make the tree good; do not paint the branches, hew down to the root and get the poison out. We do not want a reformed Church, we want a regenerated Church, a reconstructed Church, a Church of the Holy Ghost; not a framework, scaffolding, or apparatus of our own hired ecclesiastical imagination; we want a regenerated Church, every fibre, every filament made pure, made chaste with the sanctity of God. Beware of these little church-jobbers who are going about reforming any institution. When an institution needs reforming it needs destroying, that destruction may precede reconstruction, and that sense of inadequacy or unfaithfulness may lead to a cry for the baptism of regeneration.

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us,

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Verses 4-6).

"Us," "us," always "us"—a priest who invokes

a benediction upon himself as well as his people. That is brotherhood, that is holy masonry. "God, who is rich in mercy"—not rich in thunderbolts only, not rich in lightnings and tempests and great whirlwinds. Mercy is the greater part of Him; if we could but see it, His wrath is sometimes an aspect of His mercy; He slays the sinner that He may save him; He strips me naked that He may clothe me with a finer linen; He tears my nest to pieces that He may show me how to find a larger and warmer in some tree I had never thought of. "Rich in mercy," so that we may go to Him at all times, and we see Him most when we cannot see Him at all because of the burning tears of our unquenchable grief. Put God's mercy to the test; He can bear a greater pressure still; lean hard, harder, hardest, again; you cannot fatigue Omnipotence. It was "when we were dead in sins" that God showed the richness of His mercy. It was not when we were partly recovering ourselves, it was actually when we were dead in sins, and, being dead, helpless, lost; it was then that the Sun of Righteousness arose with healing in His wings. God makes us now sit in heavenly places; that is, in the heavenlies, in the world above the world, in the unseen kingdom. We trust the naked eye, and therefore miss the grand astronomy. We call our eyes of the body instruments of vision: whereas they are only instruments of deception or misinterpretation. True seeing is of the soul. Every son of man is in heaven while he is on the earth. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and His Church. They who go about with a made candle lighted by a made match will sometimes come into passages where the swirling wind will blow the lighted tallow out. What then? Live in the eternal, live in the heavenlies, have a throne spiritual, a crown imperishable, beautifully called a crown of life. O man, why be but a little higher than the brutes when thou mightest be but a little lower than the angels?

"That in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Verses 7, 8).

Salvation is not by intellect, knowledge; because then heaven would be full, if full at all, of grammarians. I question whether any grammarian can enter the kingdom of heaven. I am now speaking of him in his purely pedantic relationship. He must be more than a grammarian; a grammarian he may be, and a great grammarian, and a grammarian of whom his fellows are justly proud, but in relation to the kingdom of heaven he must be something other, greater, wiser; he must have a faculty within a faculty that can see Jesus Christ as a little child might see Him. If salvation were not as the apostle has placed it here, it would be an intellectual feat, perhaps sometimes degrading itself into an intellectual trick. But it is of grace—"by grace are ye saved through faith." The world never invented these two great words; the world does not understand either of them. "Grace," "faith," that is a foreign tongue. It is! it is heaven's tongue; it is the tongue of the Infinite Love. Grace means favour, pleasure, kindness, pure simple love, appreciation; it is a gift, not a bargain; it has no equivalent; the number stands alone, and the sign of equal-to never follows it. It is above algebra, above grammar.

"Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Verse 9).

That is the very point. There must be no boasting; we must simply stand out, and say, It is the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy hath He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." We have nothing to do with our own making. We had nothing to do with our physical birth, we have nothing to do with our superior or spiritual birth. For the next verse says:

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Verse 10).

Into what beautiful English might this be rendered! Instead of saying "workmanship" speak the word

that is almost Greek in its very form—"we are God's poems." God is the Poet, we are the poems; He makes us now in this measure, now in that measure; now sublime, now more friendly and approachable, but always pregnant with thought and love and music and mercy. Our souls, like our bodies, are all dissimilar, yet each soul is the poem of God. How so, Master, how so? Through Christ Jesus, in Christ Jesus, by the power of Jesus: the mystery of the Cross. Man, if thou knowest not these things in thy soul, and only through some worm-eaten book of man's writing, thou canst not discuss this high theme, thou art not in this great encounter with evil. Thou art an outsider ill-fed, ill-nourished, self-exiled. Come in, and learn the language of the house, the home!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we are killed by the letter of Thy law. We cannot accept it ; our souls loathe this strange meat.

Thou knowest our frame, Thou rememberest that we are dust ; we are self-regarding children. The words of Thy law are hard for us to listen to : the law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. What the law could not do, in that it was weak, Christ did by grace accomplish. We are saved by grace, by faith ; not of works, lest any man should boast. Yet we bless Thee for Thy law, for all its terribleness and severity and impossibility ; it is *Thy* law, it is the law of righteousness and integrity, and behold we stand before it amazed, and say, Lord, help us : who can reach this great height ? who can do these wondrous things ? who can keep back his hand or his heart from evil ? We have done the things we ought not to have done, we have left undone Thy law ; we have heard Thee say, Thou shalt not, and we have gone and done it with both hands greedily and earnestly and wantonly. Hear our poor soul as it cries to Thee from a depth of self-accusation, saying, God be merciful unto me a sinner ! Open Thou our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things out of Thy law ; open Thou our understanding, that we may understand the Scripture ; may these words of Thy law be no longer to us as pieces of rock, hard stones which we cannot break, but stones covered with fruit, of which if a man eat plentifully he shall hunger no more. We will bring Thy law to Thy Cross, we will ask Thee to help us by Thy love to do Thy law ; then we shall know the meaning of the wondrous words, My yoke is easy, my burden is light. Amen.

L.

SPIRIT AND LETTER.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 9TH, 1899.

"The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."—2 COR. iii. 6.



HIS is always so, in all life, in all business, and the whole evolution of the human story. It is important to notice this, because we think that so many things are in the Bible and in the Bible only. We are apt to imagine that many things would have no effect if they were not named in the Bible, whereas you will find that the Bible gathers up and vividly expresses all that is most common and all that is most profound in human life. Just as many people think that the Revelation of John the Divine or the Apocalypse is a most wonderful book, that never was heard of until John wrote it; that is how many people blunder over the interpretation of the Apocalypse. Why, the Revelation of John the Divine is just all the former part of the Bible over again; there is not a word in the Revelation of John the Divine that has perplexed all the commentators through all the ages that they ought not to have known before they came to the Revelation at all. But we *will* begin at the wrong point. Some people read the Revelation first, it has a fatal fascination for them: hence all these nonsensical calculations and forecasts which help to while the time away. If they would only begin at the Book of Genesis—but you cannot get them to do that, they do not like such commonplace and routine reading—and steadily plough their way through, they would find that the Revelation of John the Divine was the only way of ending the great record. But if the world were not unutterably and all but incurably stupid, where would the preachers be?

"The letter killeth"—in all things. In merchandise,

in the statute book, in the family, in reading, in literature, the letter killeth ; no man can live on cast iron : but the spirit giveth life—the poetry, the meaning, the purpose, the inmost intent and content ; there you have immortality. Let us see how far this can be simplified, and especially how far it can be applied ; because if we could get into the music of this text we should all be living Christians, ecstatic saints, glorious forerunners of the coming Lord.

We may have the right letters, but the wrong word. There is absolutely nothing in the letters except under certain conditions, and these conditions we are prone to overlook or to undervalue. Everything depends upon the letters being brought into the right relation. Every letter must not only be in the right place, but it must be uttered singly and collectively in the right tone. If people understood this the whole world, in the event of its being practically applied to conduct, would be full of light, full of music ; we should realise a new brotherhood, we should be almost in heaven. We may deliver the right words in a wrong tone. The soul gives the tone. The printer's press gives you the letters at so much a box or a case ; it is the tone that vivifies, it is the tone that has in it welcome and summer and resurrection, the *Come forth !* that startles the grave into surrender and bows it down in conscious and pitiable humiliation. We all know how almost impossible it is to deliver a message. Yet the messenger can prove that he said the very words he was told to say. We must allow that the messenger delivered the very words, the *ipsissima verba*, not one word missed ; and yet the message was not delivered. "The letter killeth." The letter mispronounced, misconceived, the letter with a false emphasis, the letter with a false colour, kills the original meaning of the speaker who sent the message. Hence you cannot report a speech, you cannot report a sermon ; that is to say, you may give all the words and miss the emphasis. But where would Christian controversy be if we had not a very marked genius for putting the emphasis on the wrong word ? That is how we live. The speaker who assails you quotes it may be in some rare cases your very words, but imports his own tone into them, and tells a lie without meaning it—in some cases. It is not enough to know the

letter, we must know the spirit; it is not enough to deliver the message, we must deliver it in the spirit of the man who gave it. We could so pronounce some sentences in the Bible as to blaspheme God. I have heard a man so deliver this word that I have screamed as it were with laughter and sense of comedy, and that word was none other than this, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." But the sweet message was torn to pieces, delivered without any sympathy, shouted, screamed, and the whole tone was such an anti-climax to the spirit of the words that they could excite no other sense than that of piteous comedy. Yet the words were the very words of the Bible, but torn, shattered, without soul, without tenderness, without hospitality; and no man should crack a horsewhip over such music as that most beautiful of the welcomes of Christ. We may therefore, I repeat, deliver the right words, in the right order, but in the wrong tone; and may preach the Evangelical Gospel without the Evangelical spirit: and a morning without dew is like a morning without a blessing.

Secondly. We may be correct in our letters and utterly wrong in our words. Can a man be both right and wrong at the same time? Certainly; that is what we are doing all the day. We must psychologically understand this if we would recover ourselves from the disease of heart-folly. Observe what the proposition is: We may have the right letters, and yet have the wrong word. The letter is nothing; the letter is confusing; the letter needs companionship, atmosphere, historical relationship, and, above all, a penetrating and uplifting, a redeeming and sanctifying spirit. Let us grope our way into the meaning of this strange paradox, that we may have the right letters and yet the wrong word; the right letters, and yet the wrong sermon; the right letters, and a doctrine degraded from a revelation to a profanity. Here are six letters; let them be written in capitals in your memory—R, H, E, T, M, O. What does that mean? "You must have given us the wrong letters," you say, in reply; and I answer, No, I have given you the right letters, and just the right number of letters; I could swear it. There is no mistake at all about this; these are the letters, and I leave them with you. Now

you put on your consideration cap, and tell me what you can do with R, H, E, T, M, O. "Are you sure that you have got the right letters?" Certainly! Ask another man, Are these the right letters which this first man has given to me? "Yes; I did not hear them exactly as you heard them, but I know these are the exact letters; I thought they ran like this—H, E, R, M, O, T." Are you sure these are the right letters? "Perfectly sure." "I can make nothing of them, but you may depend upon it," is the response, "they are the right letters." Will some third man help me? Two persons have been to my house to-day, and they have delivered these letters; the one said R, H, E, T, M, O; the other said, H, E, R, M, O, T. Can you read me this riddle? The third man looks at the letters; in a moment his face is alight with an expository smile. He answers, "The letters are perfectly right, but they are in the wrong order; what both the men wanted to convey to you was this word M O T H E R." "What! 'Mother'?" "Yes!" I never imagined that Mother, even as a word, could be so basely treated. They gave me the exact letters, and the exact number of the letters, but they were as men who babbled nonsense to me; but now you have come with some insight into the meaning, and you tell me that the order should have been MOTHER. I welcome the word; "the letter killeth," there is nothing in it; but the spirit, the right order, the music is Mother. That is just how the Bible is often read. The people reading it may have the right letters and the wrong meaning. They can only see that the letters are right; beyond that they can see nothing, and they stupidly and stubbornly insist that they have given the right letters, and they have founded denominations upon them. They cannot run the letters into music, they cannot set the letters in their intended consecutiveness, and therefore though they may have the Bible words they have no Biblical doctrine, they have little detached letters broken up into all sorts of relationships, but spelling nothing. Open Thou our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of Thy law; open Thou our understanding that we may understand the Scriptures; send some Philip to us who will leap upon our chariot and read the words to us as they ought to be read; then shall

we find a summer in the wilderness and great fatness in the desert of rocks. The prosaic shepherd, a man who had so much a day for doing it, could drive the flocks around the foot of Horeb and see nothing: Moses saw the tabernacle of God, the burning bush was to him more than fire; within that unexpected place there must be something—what is it? The other man saw the flame, but heard no voice, saw an instance of spontaneous combustion as he imagined it to be, but saw no shekinah, no temple-flame, no robe of deity. These two men shall read the Bible, each of them shall give the exact words of Scripture; to the one man the revelation shall be a series of inconsistencies and contradictions; to the other man it shall be as it were the very living, warm, balmy breath of God.

There is a very singular word, which requires to be approached with some cautious introduction, but which very strikingly exhibits what is intended to be conveyed by these references. Printers have a word called *pye*. The case of letters has been set up, all is in readiness to be transferred to its proper place, but in transferring the case to the press an accident occurs, and all the letters become confused, so that the first letter is the last of the paragraph, and the middle line is the first, and three or four lines displace one another, and then you have some very, very perplexing reading. But you have all the letters, the same as you have in your little denominational box that you would die for, if you could not help it; and the letters are the right letters, and just the number of letters, and yet no man in the civilised world can read the result. That is what is meant by not having the meaning in the letter. The letter is nothing. You must have the letter, the right letter, the right letter in the right place and in the right relation before you can get at the right meaning: and it is the meaning we live in, not the confusion of the letters. We may obey and disobey at the same time. That is very remarkable; it would be more remarkable still if it were not absolutely true. "The letter killeth." We do the letter, but we do not obey the spirit. You can shut a door, and offend everybody in the house by doing it. A child may be requested by the father

to shut a door, and he can so shut the door as to carry his father away into contempt and oblivion. He obeyed? He did, he did not: "The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life." The child could have shut the door so benignly and heartily as to give his father pleasure; he did carry out the letter of the father's request, but in doing so, in his spirit and meaning, he disobeyed his father. We know what this means in relation to work, to the common work of the common day. A workman may not do the work in the spirit, and therefore it is poorly or badly done. If a man shall take no pleasure in his work he cannot do it, except in a perfunctory and utterly unsatisfactory manner. It is this dislike of work that is killing England and losing England all her battles. Men who do the work only in the letter are liars and thieves and anything but patriots. When the right estimate of labour goes down, the country goes down. When men go to their work at the rate of three miles an hour and leave it at the rate of seven, they are not patriots, and they ought not to win any battles; the God of order is against them, the spirit of the spring condemns their action and dismisses them from all holy and responsible relations. And this holds good in the pulpit and out of it. Unless a man really love his work and long for it, he cannot do it. We cannot live on painted fire. No man can continue the holy ministry of the Cross for a lifetime and have as much joy in it at the end as at the beginning, except in the spirit of the Cross that he preaches; then he will be eternally young — an amaranth that no snow can chill into death. This holds good, therefore, in all sections, departments, and relations of life. The young man in the Gospel had kept all the commandments from his youth up; having heard the decalogue from a lower slope than Sinai, and yet from an infinitely higher height, namely, from the lips of Jesus Christ Himself, the young man said, All these have I kept from my youth up, I have been doing nothing else in life. Jesus said unto him, One thing thou lackest. What is that one thing? The spirit. It is the spirit that giveth life. In a certain technical and mechanical sense you may have been keeping all the ten commandments from your youth up, but one

thing is lacking—the all-transfusing and uniting spirit, that turns a burden into a delight, a duty into a song.

If we could receive these instructions we should have fewer Bible-readers, but better; we should know that the letter killeth, but that grace and truth give life and hope and music to the soul. Blessed be God, there are some people who get at the spirit of the commandments before they get at the letter. There are some poor stumbling readers that could not read the grammar, the literal code, Mosaic or other, but yet who by the power of the mighty Spirit see the meaning, and are away doing the commandments without hardly knowing the critical meaning of the code. There is hope for us all; salvation is not of grammar, salvation is not of mere intellectual ability; salvation comes of the spirit: "Marvel not that I say unto you, Ye must be born again." We must have a spiritual perception of the letter; then it will become spiritual and beautiful and the delight of our lives. Oh, how the Spirit enables me by such words to cut down the pride of men! how it is teaching me on this memorable morning to lay the axe at the root of the tree! We must get rid of the literalists, the men who only read the iron letter, and do not read the Bible in the Bible's own atmosphere. What do we want? I will tell you: the Holy Ghost; he only can read the book which he only wrote; we must become acquainted with the Author before we can read his writings with deep spiritual, lasting advantage. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God. If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him? It is expedient for you that I go away; when I go away I will send unto you another Paraclete, the abiding Comforter; he shall not speak of himself, he shall take of the things that are mine, and show them unto you. We must get our dear mothers, the daughters of trouble, who have been bathed in rivers of misery, to read us the Bible. The Bible is not an academical book. The academician has his place, and the wisest academician will be the first to define his place as very narrow, very limited. We must bring

in the sons and daughters of a deep, genuine, long experience, and they will bid us sit down beside them whilst they take the holy book and read it to us; there will be tears in their tones, there will be music in their cadence, there will be meaning in every vocal punctuation; every pause will have its high significance; and we shall say when these readers whose faces are marred with sorrow have finished their reading, It was never so heard in Israel! Never man spake like this man. Our iron taskmasters pointed to the letters, showed us nothing beyond the cold iron type; we were obliged to say, Yes, that is the letter; but in our souls there was a great hunger, and when the experienced motherly, fatherly, brotherly reader came along, we said, Read this to us; we can read the letter, but it is like knocking at a door and nobody opens from within. Then the Philips, the prophets, the apostles, the great readers of the great word, who have been schooled in sorrow and refined in heaven, shall give us the self-same words, but with such a wondrously different meaning. Jesus, come to me, and read me all Thine own sayings; let me hear them in the drip and the plash of Thine own vocal music; and I will know that Thou art the Saviour of the world!

PRAAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou hast cared for us with all the care of love. Thou hast saved us by the shedding of blood. We have peace with Thee only through our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom we have received the Atonement. We do not know the meaning of the words we use in all their depth, and tenderness, and mystery ; yet we must use these very words, for they fit our heart's necessity. We need them all ; they are music without which we could not live. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us ; all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way ; but Jesus Christ Thy Son has carried the iniquities of us all. He brings with Him the eternal glory and the eternal love ; where sin abounds grace doth much more abound. Who can measure the Christ ? Each cries after another, oh ! the depth, the height, the breadth ! Who can measure the infinity of God's loving heart ? We stand in Thy love, and there we have security, and song, and light, and hope. May we not hew unto ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water ; may we ever come to Thee, the fountain and living stream, and there be refreshed and purified. Surely we are not worthy of all this condescension and all this love, expressing itself through sacrificial blood ; we are filled with self-contempt, yet we remember that we are made in the image and likeness of God, that though fallen, we belong to the family redeemed. Enable us, we humbly pray Thee, to remember these' things, lest we accuse ourselves beyond all hope, and fret ourselves by our self-helplessness. Our help is not in ourselves, it is in the living God. We have to'd lies unto ourselves, and we have reaped the black harvest of the sowing ; but now we know that there is no help in man, that the true help is in the eternal, in the infinite, in God. These mysteries are beyond us, but so are the blue heavens, yet out of those heavens we receive morning, and summer, and golden harvest. The Lord deliver us from our own little reason and reasoning, for we were not born to live our days in such iron cage. Enable us to stretch out the wings of faith and hope and a holy and imperishable confidence, and dare the spaces of the firmament.

The Lord hear us evermore, hear us whilst we tremble and pray and wait at the Cross. Amen.

LI.

A WATERED GARDEN.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 15TH, 1899.

"A watered garden."—ISAIAH lviii. 11.



IN another discourse we have spoken about a garden that had no water. We see the other side of the picture in this most musical text, "watered garden." "The Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not." Only God could have spoken such a promise; there is in it spring and summer and autumn; it is like the voice of many waters; it is in infinite and ineffable comfort. How wonderfully cared for are some people, and have always been from their very first breath in this cold earth climate! They have been reared amidst a multitude of attention; they have been considered, watched, fed, nourished, cultivated, enriched. How different have some lives been! Yet perhaps there is not a life which has not its own little song or its own glint of sunshine. We have all seen little children in out-of-the-way places singing, dancing, playing at their mirthful games, and we have wondered that they could so express themselves considering their surroundings. But life is greater than environment, and no slum or alley is big enough for an immortal soul. What comforts some lives have had!—too many sometimes. They would have been stronger lives if they had had fewer luxuries; but every want has been anticipated, every outlook has been answered, as if it were an expectation directed towards heaven itself. Such people have had beautiful nurseries, silver cradles, toys, pictures, festivals, entertainments, companionships. It is sometimes very hard to begin at that end of life.

Other men have been like watered gardens; not gardens only, but gardens that had within them their own fountains; hence they have had flowers all the year round, they have travelled with the strawberries, they have gone step for step with violets; or in this form, or in that form, or in some other form, there has always been near them the splash of fountains, the fragrance of flowers, the ripple of music. They do not know what life is; they have had no brown bread yet, they have never walked on the shady side of the wall; they are poor companions in many instances, for they cannot speak the mother tongue of misery, and loss, and unutterable sadness; they have been themselves so much like a watered garden, that they begin to doubt whether there is any trouble in the world, or whether, if there be trouble, it be not self-made and easily accounted for, and to be treated punitively rather than sympathetically. Blessed is the man who has walked on both sides of the road, without being overborne with despair on the one side or unduly elated by the sunshine of the other.

“A watered garden.” There is too much music in these two words; we could have done with one of them. “A garden”—beautiful; “Watered”—music in itself, but “a watered garden,” both things together and both things in our possession, and we ourselves representing that dual wealth. Who can handle a psalm so magnificent, so majestic?

Yet even this text may give us pause, may lead us to the asking of some piercing questions. The further such questions penetrate the soul the better for the soul's health. “A watered garden”: cannot a garden water itself? No. That is the answer, definite, cold—discouraging, encouraging, as we may take the term. Is it not enough to be a garden? what matter about the sunshine? who cares about the rain or the dew? Is it not enough to be a garden, a geometric form, pearled and diamonded with many a flower? The king's gardens cannot do without rain; Solomon's parterres wither away but for the morning dew and the summer shower. We need something from without. We are always reminded that there is no one world; you may write it up and sneer at the other

worlds, and enclose yourselves in little square cages in which there is no room for an altar; you can do this; but again and again the Lord of the vineyard cometh to seek fruit, and if we have not supplicated His sunshine and His rain, His morning dew, we shall have no fruit for Him when He comes to visit His own land. Is it not enough to be a garden? Not without water, not without culture; the Lord Himself made a garden and also made a man to take care of it. Never rest satisfied with your garden; be thankful you have one, and enjoy it, but remember that it belongs to the acreage of the universe; it is not self-enclosed in any sense that shuts off the rest of God's creation, it is part of a greater garden, and there is a common baptism, a universal rain, a gracious benediction of dew and storm. Does a bust need feeding? No: but your child does. It is greater to be the least child than to be the greatest bust or statue set on marble or pedestalled on bronze. You do not invite the bust to come and partake of your morning feast or your evening meal; you smile at the idea of asking that marble face to sit down at your table; but, looking round the table you say, Are we all here? There is one little creature absent. No matter, the little creature is standing beside the bust, and they are talking together, and they have no need of food. That will not satisfy you. But it satisfies you in religion! What you condemn at the trough, condemn as an impossibility, you applaud at the altar, and you cast contempt upon the sanctuary. O! fools, fools, sad, unpardonable, hopeless; men who are wise in a pantheon of marble are fools when they deny their need of the rain of heaven and the dew that drops from the eyelids of the morn.

Cannot a man sustain himself by his own resources? He cannot. If any man has tried to do so he will be the loudest in his confirmation of my reply. We soon exhaust ourselves, we want the other man, the other hand to touch, the other eyes to look into, the other voice to fill the dull vacancy of our solitude. Is it not enough to be a man? What do you mean by being a man? A figure is not a man, a corpse is not a man; a mere personality, if it could be detached from all other personalities, would not be a man. We

cannot live upon stature or figure or aught that our hand can hold. Life is deeper; there is a sanctuary of life, a well far away, where spring water bubbles and gurgles and flashes out in the sunlight like a great gospel preached to the thirst of man. You think you can do with your own resources; let us test your foolish argument for one moment, if we may dignify it by the name of argument.

Self-sustenance is not the law of the body; why should it be the law of the mind? Let us reason from the lower to the higher. Every day every man has to go out of himself to keep himself going. If he would study that simple philosophy, he would soon begin to pray. But he will not: he is led captive by Satan at his will. Who can believe that the body not living upon its own resources proves to the soul that it has resources enough within itself? What a haze of words, what a palpable irony, what an evident lie! If men were as wise about their souls as they are about their bodies, the throne of religion would be established amid the nations of the earth, and the whole life of men would be an expectation, which is the next best word to a prayer. My expectation is from the heavens, my help from the hills; not the little hills, but the great hills unseen which we can sometimes almost see through the webwork of the clouds. But the mind is not sustained by itself. You have books; lay them down, be your own book. You cannot. You need some other man to write you a book, and sometimes to explain it to you. You have libraries. What are libraries but wheatfields for the mind? If I ask you in the autumn, What do you want with all these golden growths, all these purple riches and vegetable and fruit? you say, We require all these things for the sustenance of the body. And what do you want with all these libraries, and museums, and academies, and colleges, and schools of every name and degree? These are the wheatfields which the soul reaps, and it needs them every one, for the soul is bigger than literature. That is all I want you to admit; that admission carries with it everything that is relevant to the spiritual argument. You want something outside yourself — a book you have not written, a study you have not explored. And

the soul lives by friction with some other soul. God is fire. To come into happy attrition with Him, or contact, or friction, who can tell what may come out of that soul touching soul, man praying to God? Prayer is a kind of friction if truly wise and honest, and out of that friction come sparks to lighten the night and put out the common sun.

We are continually undergoing a process of education. There is an unshaped and unpaid education going on constantly in the world. We are gathering from one another; by one another we are helped, assisted, stimulated, and inspired. There is a common life as well as an individual life. The brick that is in the wall is more than a brick; it is part of the wall. It is not a brick, it is a brick in relation; it helps to complete the massiveness, or to illustrate the beauty of the architectural idea. So a little human soul is not detached, and orphaned, and isolated; it is part of a greater soul, a grander socialism, a diviner commonwealth. If you had to live upon your own bodily resources, I question whether after six months you would be visible to the naked eye; if you have been living upon your spiritual and intellectual resources, you will be invisible to the highest telescopes known in all the universe. A man's soul needs refreshment as well as his body. There are men who starve their souls, feed their bodies, and rot into oblivion.

What hast thou that thou hast not received? The reception is itself a kind of religion. To receive gratefully and appreciatively is almost to pray, or sing a holy psalm, or offer a sacred sacrifice. What hast thou that thou hast not received?—thou who didst ask but a moment ago whether it were not enough to be a garden without being dependent on morning dew, or dew of the twilight, or rain of the black cloud. What hast thou that thou hast not received? We take every man from every other man something for the common sustenance and for the common completeness. The book you read gave you an idea; the song you heard lifted your soul to another level, if but for a moment, just long enough to show you that there are higher levels than you have yet attained. Who can

tell what ministries are playing upon him? You say, Pay for an idea? Certainly; in fact, there is nothing else to pay for, and the only man you do not sufficiently pay is the man of ideas. An idea is light, liberty, inspiration, encouragement. You have shaped the iron, and have labelled it in plain figures; but the shaping of it was the carrying out of an idea. That poor piece of iron or large piece, as we call large—though there is really nothing large—that piece of iron has been melted, hammered, shaped at some other man's bidding. Behind the blacksmith is a mental goldsmith, who says, Not so, but thus; and the distinction between the so and the thus is an idea. We only pay for merchandise because we are hardly yet out of the brute stage. By-and-by it will be realised that the only man worth giving to is the man who says, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God; blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. The feeder of the soul will be welcomed one day as the only true philanthropist.

What care God has taken of every one of us; what rains He has poured on the earth; what sunshines has He poured upon the whole globe! the lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places, we have a goodly heritage. We did not make the libraries, and if we sowed the seed it was seed we caught from some other harvest. The whole evolution of life is a continuity—vital, sensitive, marvellous in its power of self-enlargement, which is but another form of enlargement in God.

As we do not leave a garden to take care of itself, neither should we leave ourselves to ourselves. How foolish is the man who says, I leave my children to bring themselves up, to do very much in life as they please; I let them have their own undisciplined way; no superintendence over them is exercised or thought of. If you will do the same with your garden you will be a consistent man, you bestow less attention on a child than you bestow upon a dog; for I have heard you order him to his kennel and bid him be silent. If you will leave your garden to itself as you say you

leave your little child, then I shall see what will become of the child, after I have studied the issue of your policy in the garden. Have you ever seen a garden that has been left to itself? What do you think of it? It has never been pierced by the spade, it has never had any growth pruned, its hedge has never felt the cut of a knife, there has been no renewal from season to season of the roots and bulbs and seed: shall I go with you and look at that garden? I would, but I should be compelled to take it as a text and to preach to you and ask if that is the kind of way which you have treated your own soul, without discipline, without study, without literature, without intellectual sustenance, without that kind of intercourse which means friction, and which means after friction and with friction light.

God waits to give us every one more water, more sustenance, more sunshine. What we might be if we would enjoy our privileges! Into what great distance we might have entered the sanctuary if we had really cared to be at the upper and inner altar that we might be blessed by its sacrifices! Oh that thou hadst hearkened unto me! then had thy peace flowed as a river and thy righteousness had been as the waves of the sea. A branch cannot bear fruit except it abide in the vine, and the Vine is Christ, and except we be in Christ our souls cannot receive the true culture or the true nourishment. We draw our heart's blood from Him, we live in Christ; and he lives nearest the heavenlies and nearest the conscious immortality who lives most and most deeply in the Lord. Blessed are they who have Jesus Christ as their bread and their water, and they will have bread to eat that the world knows not of; they will be mysteries to men; people will be unable to understand them in common ways or to express them in common symbols and quantities. The Christian ought to be as Christ in his own little degree—a mystery to the world. How he lives who can tell? None.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, grant us the seeing eye and the understanding heart and the obedient will. To this end do Thou grant unto us a plenteous pouring out of the Holy Spirit into the soul of man. God is a Spirit ; the spiritual alone can discern spiritual things. Grant unto us, we humbly pray Thee, the spiritual faculty ; teach us that morality is the guarantee of vision ; teach us by Thy Spirit that it is character that sees, not genius. Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God. Would that all the Lord's people were seers ! we should have less unrest and godless disquiet and tribulations and mutual distrust. May we see beyond the wall, may we see beyond the cloud, may we see the meaning of things ; teach us that all this embroidery and robing and garniture of stars and constellations and blue heavens and the green earth and the throbbing sea, that all this is but part of an infinite parable. Help us to read the symbolism, to be true idealists, to enter by the spirit into the temp'le of the spiritual. We are now in the earth sphere, in the time space,—a poor sphere, a poor space ! We are surrounded by dilapidations, we are convulsed by needless terrors : oh that by Christ, who gave sight to the blind, we might see the permanent within the transient, the real beyond the parabolical ! The Lord help us herein by the power of the Cross of Christ, else we shall assuredly be the victims of ignorance and superstition. Amen.

LII.

SEER AND PROPHET.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 19TH, 1899.

"He that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer."—

I SAM. ix. 9.



SO long as they both meant the same thing, what does it matter what they were called? If they did not always mean the same thing, then it signifies a great deal. We must not have old names with new meanings, nor must we invent new ideas to suit old terms. The parable of the old wine and the new bottles, the old bottles and the new wine, old ideas and new conceptions, affords a very tempting ground for fancy and invention and divers knavery. When we have a word, let us know exactly what its meaning is. When we change the word, publish the fact; do not let us have any vocal or verbal legerdemain; let us beware of trifling with terms, let us beware of meddling with the currency of the King's language.

"He that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer." Probably there was really no change of a vital kind, and therefore the change of terms resolved itself into the popular question, What's in a name? But there is a principle here; there is a great moral possibility just at this very point; let us have no verbal ambiguity or ambiguity in deed, and then tell others that we really meant in substance the same thing, when we did not. There is a morality of language, there is a currency of words; and we must not keep some little private mint in which we counterfeit the inscribed and superscribed glory of the heavenly realm. Let us apply this change of names to the circumstances in which we find ourselves in our own day.

First. That which is now called a Discovery was beforetime called a Revelation. I prefer the beforetime word; it is deeper, it holds more, it is intellectually and spiritually more capacious; it is ideally and imaginatively more poetical and ideal. We speak now of discoveries; the old, old people that read human history spake of revelations, visions: —“The word of the Lord came unto me.” I like the older language; it is more religious, more spiritual, more morally sensitive and tender. When a man says, “I have discovered,” he may possibly put himself in a false position. When he says, “It has been revealed to me,” he at once takes his right place in creation, and what is more, he gives God His right place in His own universe. We speak of So-and-so as a great discoverer. He who is called a discoverer was beforetime called a receiver; and it is better: what hast thou that thou hast not received? And does science lose anything by coming to us with her austere face in which some tenderness is hidden, notwithstanding the severity of the facial line, when she says, I have been communing with the Lord, and He has turned over a page for me, and I will tell you what I have read on the new page? Science would lose nothing by such modesty; she would gain much; she would challenge a larger area of human confidence; she would kneel with Ignorance, and taking the hard horny hand of Ignorance in her white soft palm, they would both say together, Our Father which art in heaven. It would be better.

He that is now called an Agnostic was beforetime called a Blind Man. I prefer the beforetime description; it seems to get nearer the truth. It would be impossible, I think, to find a proud blind man. Did you ever in all your companionship and confidences find a proud blind fellow creature? It would be difficult for a blind man to be proud, but it is the natural air of my lord the agnostic. You never found a humble agnostic; he could not be humble; he has eloquence enough to pretend to be humble, but in the soul of him, if he has a soul, he is as proud as Lucifer. He wants to get rid of sundry moral obligations. Besides, I think it is a fine thing to have a Greek name as well as an English one; there is a

classical flavour about it to those who do not know better. A dear, sweet friend wrote to me three or four names beside the name given to her by her father and mother. I said, I do not know you. She said, These are my Roman Catholic names. It seemed to be quite a little fortune to be able to sign so much and almost to cover the breadth of a sheet of note-paper; it seemed to be a long way on towards making and signing a five-pound note. So I replied to her and signed myself Joseph Matthew Mark Luke and John Parker. She took it in good nature and said the hammer had struck the head of the nail.

“He that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.” So that which is now called an Accident was beforetime called Providence. I like the old term best; it covers more ground, it is nobler, it stands in a more royal majesty. I will not have any accidents in my little world; I have no room for accidents,—little broken pieces of china that nobody can patch together again. I have in my little world of imagining and experience a ruling, loving, watchful Providence. We have high talks together; I have learned the language of Providence:—Fear not; lo, I am with you alway; not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father; the very hairs of your head are all numbered; if God so clothe the grass which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, is He going to let you fall to the ground, man—the wreck of his own image, a reminiscence of Eden? And my soul says, No; and we have high revels of joy together on the green hillside when Providence in many a long soft sunny summer afternoon goes over the whole plan with me and says, See those beautiful little graves; they are graves of little ones that have been taken to heaven; and those larger graves, every one of them is noted in the heavenly books, and every soul that has escaped the time sphere is enrolled in a loftier registry and secured by an inviolable protection. Then Providence teaches me a little hymn that the soul can understand, the music of which is very weird, and can only be safely entrusted to the summer wind, but the singing of it does the soul good like a summer

rest. Which will you have—Accident, or Providence; a thing that happened without anyone knowing that it was going to be or for what purpose it came; or will you see in all life God's handiwork, the shaping of the great Creator, Redeemer, Father,—this large, that small; the colours intermingled, rainbows in stones, in ideal marbles,—which will you have? Man, say, and say distinctly, which, and play the fool no more!

Now, never suppose that a thing is changed simply because the name is changed; it may not be the same, but it may be. Many persons do not understand their own religion, unless they hear it from their own preacher, in their own place of worship—the only place that is sure of the benediction of God; the sun never shines upon nettles; the sun shines only upon broad, fragrant roses. There are people who do not think the Gospel is preached unless it is given out in numbers and in the same order. There are persons who can sing out of only one hymn-book; I do not know them by name, and I have no wish to ascertain what book it is they sing out of. I should like to sing out of all hymn-books. I go to all churches—to Roman Catholic and Protestant, and High Church and Low Church and Broad Church, and I can learn something from every one of them. Every man sees his own angle of the kingdom of God, and I say to him, Dear sir, would you allow me just to put my feet in your footprints that I may, if possible, catch your view of the kingdom of heaven? The Lord deliver us from narrow-mindedness, from sectarianism, from living in one little cobwebbed corner and looking at God's blue universe through one cobwebbed chapel window.

That which is now called A better state of things was beforetime called Regeneration. And I like it better. Oh for the old, old Regeneration!—the metaphysical, penetrating, all-including new birth. There are many dusters and sweepers in the world, persons who go about with little dusters, and rubbing things and saying, Now they are all right. It is one thing to have a Hyde-Park-Sunday-afternoon-demonstration duster and another thing to have a Holy Ghost.

Between these two things lies an infinite distance; they are separated by the diameter of the universe. If I could speak to all young men in one thunder-breath it would be to the effect, Beware of dusters, sweepers, scavengers; all of which are very useful in their own sphere; some of them are indispensable within their own limitation, but only God, whom we adore and worship as the Holy Ghost, can get at the root and core of things, and create, not new works, but a new worker, and therefore new works. You are giving up all the grand old words; you have now discoveries, instead of Revelation; accidents, instead of Providence; a new state of things, instead of Regeneration. If a minister, however distinguished, were to announce a course of lectures on Justification by Faith, men would be too busy to hear him; they would call it theological, they would regard it as not being up to the times: whereas that doctrine is always up to date, and until you pass through that gate of justification by faith you cannot see the kingdom of God. That kingdom of God is not an intellectual conundrum, it is an internal experience, a communion of the soul with the soul's Creator. Until you become thus vitally theological you will make no progress in your studies of the upper and eternal kingdom.

That which is now called the Continuity of Law was beforetime called the Sovereignty of God. I prefer the latter designation. Man likes new words; man is still infantile, and still fond of amusingly clever mechanical toys. I have not known the human mouth so expressive of sensuous delight and complete torpor-like satisfaction as when it shaped itself into the phrase, the continuity of law. No one knew what it meant, but that was the beauty of it: to have ghosts whose names you know and whose addresses you have marked in your note-books are ghosts not worth knowing. To have a series of words that sound as if they meant something and that yet lay no moral responsibility upon you, that is a Bank Holiday of the soul. Beforetime called the sovereignty of God: The Lord reigneth; clouds and darkness are round about Him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne; He doeth all things well; He

measureth out the heavens with a span, He spreadeth them out like a curtain to dwell in; and as for the stars, a million million host of stars, He calleth them all by name, and that He is great in power not one faileth, Arcturus and Pleiades and the whole mystery of the Milky Way, and the paths of the fire-flash, and the channels of the thunder, and the foundations of the unseen; all these are under His governance and continual and beneficent supervision. I therefore found the continuity of law very poor picking when my soul was in unutterable distress. I never invited the continuity of law to come and spend an evening with me when all the stars shrank from the vision of my sorrow; but I did invite the living Lord, the sovereign Father, the Father-Mother-Sister of all the worlds, to come and stanch the wound and dry the flood of tears. And He came. Never did morning break so brightly over the hills as morning broke after our night's conference in black Gethsemane. Do not expect me, therefore, to give up the old words. I cannot now undertake to invent a new gospel. These fifty years and more I have been preaching, by the grace of God and the comfort of His Spirit, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of the world, and that which beforetime was called the Gospel I cannot now have called a new idea, a novel theory, an invention which the inventor wishes everybody to try at their own expense. There are many inventors sitting round, seeing how you like the new invention; they would not drink the poison themselves, they wanted to practise upon some vile corpus, some poor body that was in search of a new poison. So I, standing here, after these thirty years of City life, standing in the very midst of London, in the midst of the week, and in the middle of the day, I am still enabled by the grace of Christ to preach the old, old Gospel, and to say with my heart what I love to hear children sing, "The old-time Gospel is good enough for me."

Do not, therefore, let us be victimised by phrases; do let us allow some scope for individuality of experience. The Lord hath been pleased to set divers officers in His Church; He has made some prophets, and some pastors, some evangelists and teachers, and

He has made some men mighty in prayer, and to me He has given the keys of invisible kingdoms and empires yet unmeasured. Let us recognise all the grades of the hierarchy, and let every man understand that whatever he holds he holds as Christ's trustee.

That which is now called the Survival of the Fittest was beforetime called Predestination, election, foreordination: and these are the grand terms when properly defined and understood. I believe in destiny, I believe that every man comes into the world with a distinct gift, with an individuality all his own, and that it is his business so to work his individuality as to increase the common stock of intelligence and goodness and usefulness. I cannot understand how it is that things are now going, apart from the doctrine of predestination, foreordination, special election to office and special endowment of faculty. Here is a man sent into the world with a harp; I, listening to his harp, think I could do as well. The only revenge the harper wants is to let me try. He is a quiet man the harper, his soul is too large to be easily fretted; so he allows me to sit on his stool and to finger his harp, and leaves me to pronounce the verdict; and I never mention the fact to a single human creature when I have got out of his presence. But I have a harp of my own. What is that harp, O thou poor man? It is a harp whose name you know, and it is God's harp, God's invention, and a most useful, beautiful harp it is. What do you think the name of my harp is? It is a word of one syllable, only a word or two more than the name of the instrument which emits such thrilling music. He has a harp, I have a plough, and we are both singing the same tune, worshipping the same Creator, accepting a common stewardship. The plough when profitably and properly applied is an instrument of music. Do not take a low view of it. So is your task, whatever it be; so your ministry, your lowly occupation. Accept what is given as given by the loving hand of God, and under His grace and Spirit. Man! do the best with it, stand up and renew the fight. He that endureth to the end shall be saved.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless Thee that we see through the letter into the spirit and meaning of Thy kingdom, and that we understand those who struggle to express that which is inexpressible. We thank Thee that things are unspeakable, we bless Thee for Thine unspeakable Gift ; we bless Thee for those things that are immeasurable, so that we cannot ascertain their length and breadth and depth and height ; we thank Thee for those things that pass knowledge ; herein we become truly spiritual, intensely religious, transferring our life into the very spirit and love of God. These are the mysteries of the faith, these are the joys that shine upon us whilst we tarry in the temple of God. Lift us out of our narrow surroundings, and show us, we humbly pray Thee, the true and foreordained environment of the soul. May we remember that we are but dust as to the body, but of the nature of God as to the spirit ; if we sow to the flesh we shall reap of the flesh corruption ; if we sow to the spirit we shall reap life everlasting. To be carnally minded is death, to be spiritually minded is life and peace. May our life be hidden with Christ in God, may we have an inner life, a city of the mind, a sanctuary of the soul ; may we have bread to eat that the world knoweth not of, and that no harvest-field of time ever grew amid all its golden grain. Feed us with Thyself, nourish us with Thine own grace, and bring us to the measure of the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. In His mighty name we pray, in His great grace we travel through the wilderness and make it blossom as the rose, and in His faith, the faith in God which is by Christ, we look into the grave until it smiles in flowers. Amen.

LIII.

EPHESIANS IV. 14-23.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 16TH, 1899.



WE are reading in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. It is more like walking through a forest than dallying in a garden. We must in many a case give up his grammar and acquaint ourselves with the music of his soul. Paul did not write much; when he did write he wrote as a blind man might be supposed to write, in large capital letters, saying, "Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand." Poor weak-eyed man, he could hardly see the boldest capitals which he inscribed upon his paper; and as a tired man he thought he had done more than he really had done; he thought it was a large letter because it took so much out of him. There are many standards of measurement.

This Epistle to the Ephesians must be true in its divinity because it is so palpably, and shall I say glaringly? true in its humanity. Where the one thing which we can test is so true, the probability is that that which is beyond the present metaphysic, that which is spiritual and transcendental, is also true. What a grasp of human nature the Apostle always had! He seemed to lay a great grip upon us and explain us to ourselves. We are not dealing with a posture-master, nor are we in commerce with a man who gives small rules in etiquette and superficial interpretations in religious ceremony; we feel a great grip on the soul, and a man telling us through the ear of the body into the ear of the spirit what we are by nature, by conduct, under whose dominion we live; and we confirm his testimony, saying, with great tearful, terrible amen.

It is as thou hast spoken. What a delight it is to have confidence in the teacher! How exceedingly disquieting it is to walk through perilous places with a man who is himself afraid! His fear doubles the peril. If we were within the shadow of a great strong man, within hearing of a man who could speak great sure words to us, we should feel that "well-begun is half-done," we should make a temple of his confidence and rest in it, yea, and sometimes fall to singing as if we were the happier for the danger. It is so we feel when we are in the companionship of the Apostle Paul. His benedictions are inspirations; his instructions are battles; his battles are victories.

We have come to the fourteenth verse of the fourth chapter.

"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

Yet we must always be children. Children are so good that we baptise them; we receive them into our arms with this certificate, written in light and perfumed in the incense of the morning, "Of such is the kingdom of God," and we baptise them with the dew of the morning. Yet we must in another sense no longer be children, we must not tarry in the cradle; he would be a monster, not a man, who at thirty years of age still needed to be rocked to sleep in his cradle. It is in these things that we are not to be children; not in the child-sense, the childlike sense, the little clinging, trustful child-sense; always that; in that sense the heavens are full of cradles. To God we must always be beginning; to the Infinite we must always be little sparklets, mere specks and blossoms of things, holding within us great and solemn possibilities. In another sense we are not to be childish, foolish, receiving instruction and letting it fall out of the mind as soon as it gets into it; in that sense let us be no more children, tossed to and fro, carried about by every wind; that is the children's little game, and for children it is natural and it is pleasant. What is the child going to be? Ask the little creature to tell you on Monday what it is going to

be, and the child has a Monday answer; on Tuesday, What are you going to be? Something other than was said on Monday. It is the privilege of little boys to be one thing one day and another another, and seven different things every year: that is natural and beautiful; but there comes a time when all this uncertainty and movableness of mind must end, a decision must be come to, we must make an election or a choice; henceforth we must be men with a definite programme, an assured purpose, a worthy scheme of life. The mischief is that some people have no plan of existence; they live from hand to mouth, and generally at other people's expense; most of them have an idea that they could be something very great, which is a certain sign that they will never mount the ladder. The Apostle would have us fix upon a scheme, plan, or thought of life, and keep at it. Persistence is success. If you are seven different things on the seven different days of the week, what can you possibly come to? If a man shall be a lecturer, a politician, an adventurer, a painter, and a preacher, he will be a poor preacher. You cannot be all that, and a preacher. A preacher is never thrown in; he is never mixed up under the indefinite designation of an *et cetera*. That is the reason why I have seen some men fail in the pulpit. They were so much more eager to get up on Monday morning to go to the picture gallery than they were to get up on Sunday morning to go to the pulpit; they deserved to fail. That is why I have seen other men succeed with but moderate talents; they have been faithful to their call, definite and certain in their convictions; patiently and lovingly they have continued at their work; and patient continuance in well-doing means a diadem at the last, a Well-done that is more golden than a golden crown. The Apostle Paul, therefore, insists that there must be a period put to childishness, and he further insists that we must begin with a meaning and work with a purpose and light our way through the wilderness with the lamp of hope.

Look what an image of human nature is given in these words—"alienated from the life of God." The whole of the 18th verse is a great nocturne, it is a picture struck out of a cloud, it is a statue hewn out

of sevenfold midnight. "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them." "Alienated from the life of God"—O how shall we represent that isolation, that desolated orphanage? Shall we imagine a tree taking its roots out of the earth and placing itself upon the face of a rock that it may have no more connection with the soil?—for the soil is full of light, the soil is full of dew; though there be no rain on the surface, there is dew at the core. We dig down to dew, and in all the strata through which we dig we are cutting sunshine to pieces; the earth is a store of morning, a gallery piled with sunshine. Shall we imagine the poor tree saying, I will have none of it, I will tear myself out of this place, and instead of seeking to plant myself in another part of the soil I will lay myself down on the rock and turn my roots to the morning sun? It cannot be; for a day or two it may seem as though it were a possibility and even a fact, but only for a day or two; the tree must be rooted in the earth as the earth is rooted in God, where all things grow harmonically, proportionately, sympathetically, and tree waves to tree as hymn might sing to hymn. There is a dread possibility of a man taking himself out of the current of things. The soul that takes itself out of the appointed currents shall die. No institution has a right to set itself outside the law of evolution. Evolution means purpose, scheme, predestination, sovereignty of God, the outworking of a grand beneficent plan; and no man has a right to set himself outside the law, and to let the law roll past him; if so, he does but make himself a nameless, hapless grave. Hence the folly of those persons who are always wanting to build themselves on a narrow interpretation of antiquity. We are thankful that antiquity is a word in the English language, because it has sometimes a kind of soothing and quieting effect upon a given species of mental adolescence and incompleteness. But the true antiquity is to-day; time has never been so old as it is at this moment; the hoar of the ages rested upon to-day as it was born into history. Let us, therefore, believe in spiritual evolution; let us get away from the nakedness of sin into the white linen of the saints, the purple and the true luxury of the Divine sonship.

Many persons are trying to live without God; they are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them. They do not know that other people are praying for them, they do not understand the philosophy of intercession. We know not who may be praying for us in the general assembly and Church of the firstborn; but we know that Jesus Christ Himself ever liveth to make intercession for us. It would be like human nature to take favours from God, and to smite the hand that gives them. There may be atheists; I never met one; I have met not a few who have professed atheism; the word was greater than their understanding of it; the little boy who carries his yard of string in his pocket really cannot, however ambitious his intention, fathom the Atlantic.

There is another expression in the 18th verse that is so true—"the blindness of their heart." Do not pity the blind man on the streets with his little dog and his mendicant's little tin; that is not the man to pity; the man to pity may be the man who is pitying him: for the one man has lost only the eyes of the body, the other may be blind in his heart; he does not see moral distinctions, he does not recognise spiritual differences; he takes the right for the wrong, and the right for the left, and he goes up under the impression that he is going down, and he goes down under the impression that he is going up, and he lives in mental and moral confusion. There are moral lunatics; do not go to the lunatic asylum and say concerning the inmates, Poor creatures! how sad to have lost reason and understanding! It is a poor speech; the real lunatic may be outside the asylum. He is a lunatic who does not understand anything of God, truth, light, beauty, goodness. The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. What if we who pity the blind and the unseen should ourselves be blind in heart and darkened in understanding. Fool! I would say to my poor soul sometimes; thou art the blind, thou art the insane, for the King passed and thou didst not see Him; the whole universe is an argument in parable, and thou didst not understand the sun.

In the 19th verse there is an expression more

terrible, if possible, than we have yet come upon. "Past feeling." Read the whole verse:—

"Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."

"Past feeling." Is not he past feeling who for thirty years has heard the Gospel preached with simplicity and pathos and power, and is to-day a worm of the earth, a groveller in the mud? "Past feeling": the spring comes without being hailed and saluted, and the summer is allowed to pass by without a smile of recognition, and the golden autumn is only regarded as a contribution to the market-place, and all the jewellery of frost and all the spotless linen of the mountain snow go for nothing, because he who was made in the image and likeness of God has lost sensibility and power of response to all poetic and ideal and spiritual appeals. On some people everything is lost; on some hearts we waste our kindness; on some lives fathers and mothers have thrown themselves away, their generous love being regarded as a commonplace that comes without appreciation or response. It is possible to be overfed religiously; it is possible to hear too much good preaching; it is possible to hear it under the impression that it comes as a mere matter of course; not knowing that every sentence is a blood-drop, every cry of the appealing heart a loss of nervous energy. To preach to people who are "past feeling," that must be solitude and desolation and unutterable misery. Given over, given themselves over to work with greediness all manner of badness,—to work with the right hand, with the left hand, and work with both the hands, and love it, and kiss it, and work it over and over again, and roll it under the tongue as a sweet morsel; and then say they have been to church. To hell!

In all this magnificent portrayal of human nature there are top-lights, half-lights, bright lights, gleamings above the brightness of the sun. For example, Paul talks about coming "unto a perfect man." He will not despair at all the rubbish which he has been portraying and pathetically describing; he sees the possibility of growth. A perfect man means a mature man, a full-grown man who has reached the highest

inch of his possible stature not a perfect man in any merely sentimental and pietistic sense, but full grown. The orchard is perfect when the apples are ready for plucking; the acres are perfect when the golden grain swings in the gentle breeze, and says without words, I am ready to be cut down and to be turned into bread.

And what a beautiful expression we find in the 15th verse—"speaking the truth in love": truthing it in love, doing everything in love; growing up into Him in all things in love; finding our duty in love. If we lose this power of love we cannot do any duty, we cannot be our best selves. It is motive that gives a man the true self-possession. His mere taste or his mere sense of duty might shrink from certain tasks and efforts. To mere duty the day is so long; to love, the longest day that June can show us is but a flash of light. If we go to church because it is our duty we shall never get there; we may get there in the body, a ton weight of stupidity; but if we go because we have been hungering and thirsting after the holy exercise, we heed nor rain nor snow nor burning sun nor long distance over the city streets; we fly in great expectation and with great warmth and glow of love. It is the same with everything else; with painting, with music, with writing books, with daily drudgery, with household tasks; if we do these things when we do not want to do them we will be burdened and utterly distressed, but if we work in the spirit of love, then let work come, and more and more of it, it does but multiply the acreage of a sunny and gladsome field. And then, in another sense, we are to be filled with a spirit of love that makes increase, love that edifies itself in love, love that doubles itself, love that says to the labourer, I will love you still more; if you will work another hour I will bring to your hands all you want, and we will both do it together. Love building itself up in love,—tautology to the grammarian, poetry to the poet.

And how is all this to be done? By being renewed in the spirit of our mind, according to verse 23. "Renewed," that is great; "in the spirit," that is great;

“in the spirit of your mind”—O that is getting to a very inward part of the soul, piercing through fold after fold, until the light, the grace of God, gets into the very beginning of manhood and renews it. That is regeneration; not a new notion, a new opinion, a new theory in morals, in theology, in politics, in patriotism; no, but a new man. Many persons are renewed in their opinions who are not renewed in the spirit of their mind. The Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword, it pierces to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and until we are cleansed in there, in that central centre, we do not know the meaning of the kingdom of God; and nothing can get in there with cleansing power but one thing—the blood of Jesus Christ. Precious Saviour, mighty Saviour, send Thy cleansing blood through the innermost currents of my heart, that I may be without spot or wrinkle or taint or stain, holy after the quality of the Divine purity!

WORDS FOR PREACHERS.

Common auditors receive not a doctrine in the abstract, only minding what is taught ; but in the concrete, with reference to the person that teacheth it. Therefore, if your credit be cracked, it is as bad as if your brains were crazed : you may preach of heaven and hell until doomsday ; and the truth will be truth in your mouths, not in their hearts.—*Adams*, 1654.

If any people be wiser than to follow the examples of such men ; yet the loathsomeness of their lives will make their doctrine the less effectual. Though you know the meat to be good and wholesome, yet it may make a weak stomach rise against it, if the cook or the servant that carrieth it have leprous or dingy hands. Take heed, therefore, to yourselves, if ever you mean to do good to others.—*Baxter*, 1615-1691.

A cracked bell is a very harsh sound in every ear ; the metal is good enough, and maybe was once well tuned ; it is the rift that makes it so unpleasant by jarring. Just thus is a scandalous, ill-lived preacher ; his calling is honourable, his noise is heard far enough ; but (O, sad but !) the flaw which is noted in his life mars his doctrine, and offends those ears that would take pleasure in his teaching. It is possible that such a one, even by that discordous noise, may ring in others into the triumphant church of heaven, whilst there is no remedy for himself but fire, either for his reforming of judgment.—*Bishop Hall*, 1574-1656.

Where do vices show so foul as in a minister, when he shall be heavenly in his pulpit alone ? Certainly, they wound the gospel that preach it to the world, and live as if they thought to go to heaven some other way than that they teach the people. How unseemly is it, when a grave cassock shall be lived with a wanton reveller, and with crimes that make a loose one odious ! Surely, God will be severest against those who will wear His badge, and seem His servants, yet inwardly side with the devil and lusts. They spot His honour, and cause profane ones to jest at His holiness. We see, the prince suffers in the fails of his ambassador ; and a servant's ill action is some touch to his master's reputation : nor can he free himself, but by delivering him up to justice, or discarding him : otherwise he would be judged to patronise it. Other offences God may punish, this He must, lest the enemies of His truth triumph against Him.—*Felltham*, 1668.

PRAYER.

THOU hast given us cause to praise Thee ; therefore will we not be silent in Thy courts, we will open our mouth and sing loudly unto the Lord ; and our song shall be of mercy and judgment. Thy mercy endureth for ever. May our whole life be a song of love and consecration and thankfulness. Thou dost come to us every morning with a psalm ; the light is music, the growing day is a growing anthem. Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. We live in Thy love ; without Thy love there is no life : God is love. God is a Spirit ; God is in us, and about us, and in Him we live and move and have our being. May we realise this glorious fact, that it may kill the spirit of fear and the spirit of self-reproach ; for we have cut our heart to pieces when we have remembered our sin against God. But the blood of Jesus Christ Thy Son cleanseth from all sin : where sin abounds grace doth much more abound. We will look to the grace, and not to the sin ; to the Saviour, and not to ourselves. We humbly pray Thee come to us, and be our morning psalm, and in the twilight of declining day be the star of the evening, and between these star-songs set Thy great chorus of the sun ; then shall our life be full of sacred music, and be a sacrifice of praise, and the house of the Lord shall be great as the universe which He has created. Amen.

LIV.

EPHESIANS v. 8-18.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 30TH, 1899.

“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord : walk as children of light :

(For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth ;)

Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.

But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light : for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess ; but be filled with the Spirit.”



BSERVE the striking series of contrasts in this marvellous passage. Let us trace the series, and learn what we can from these contrastive pictures. The first is in the eighth verse. This word “darkness” is not indicative of mere dim or transient fog or inconvenient grading of light ; it is a deeper, severer, ghastlier word. “Ye were sometimes darkness,” not dark, but darkness itself, sevenfold night, yea, more than night ever was ; for surely every night must have somewhere and somehow its relieving star. It was not so with you in your former state ; you were living darkness, without ray or glint or beam of light, as far away from light as it is possible to be. That is a wonderful conception of human nature and of human condition before the Father of lights. You were not merely broken lights, scattered beams, that it was impossible to put

together; there was no beam in you, you had never been illumined, you had never been warmed, you had never even heard of the summer of holiness; ye were simply incarnate, embodied darkness. Who could call us out of that state? What matchmaker could strike a little flash that would drive away such gloom? Where the darkness is so dense God Himself must handle the occasion, or there is nothing for it but fatal night. Sometimes we have said of a great singer, He is not musical, he is music; that is to say, he is not a merely mechanical player, a man who has got into his memory what is written in a book, but the music is in him, a well of water springing up into everlasting melody. So, reversing the picture, the Gentiles were not dark, they were darkness; unpenetrated, and but for the divine mercy, impenetratable clouds. Occasionally we say of a man, He is not eloquent, he is eloquence, embodied, incarnate, breathing, walking, living eloquence; he has not learned something by rote, he has not recited something of which his memory is in charge, but the holy gift is moving in him like a spirit, a genius, a heavenly choir. Reverse the picture, and you have the Apostle's idea: Ye were not dark, you were darkness, the thing itself, sevenfold night; no imagination could conceive the intensity of the darkness of your condition.

Then the contrastive "but"—"but now . . . light"; not partial light, not a grey light, not a mere hint of light, but as truly as you were once darkness, so truly are you now light. "Walk as children of light." The miracle is as great on the one side as on the other. Chaos was not partial chaos; chaos was not a mere mood or transient phase of disorder; it was utter confusion, without date, without measure, without figure, a tumultuousness and disorderliness not to be spoken of in words in any adequate sense or with any adequate fitness. Chaos is not partly order and partly confusion; the old chaos on which the Holy Spirit brooded was utter chaos, shapelessness, amorphousness, that which could not be ruled into order by any skill created; but now, since the beginning, chaos has given place to order, proportion, music, perspective, and all the apocalypse and summer of colour. That is

the difference. Chaos has no history. People want to know when the creation began. They can never know it. All depends upon what you mean by creation. The thing upon which creation operated may be calculable, but the thing out of which creation took its materials may lie back, so to say, in the memory of God alone. Transfer the figure to the Christian life, and then you have first the darkness, utter dense darkness, on which moon and star never shone, not to speak of dawning light and wakening morning. Then you have light, glory, midday, points of extreme. Unless we recognise the extremity of the points we shall lose the whole movement of the miracle. Let us keep our memories well refreshed with the fact that once we were darkness; let us pity those who are in darkness still. Do not imagine for a moment that the man on the street can come into the sanctuary of God and partake of it and be as one of the called saints of heaven all in a moment. He cannot; nor can he hear the Gospel, much less understand it. He is darkness. A great mystery of movement must take place in his soul by the power of the Holy Ghost. We want again Genesis first chapter and first few verses; we want especially the Spirit brooding over the infinite night, the infinite disorder, with a view to having brought out of it proportion and harmony and rest.

As to these workers of darkness, verse 11 lays down the instruction succinctly and unmistakably:—"Have no fellowship." Do we rest there? No; we come upon this remarkable "but" which recurs in the passage quite startlingly: "but rather reprove them." Do you mean rebuke them? No. Do you mean disallow them, or look unfavourably upon them, or look askance at them? No; all that, all that and something more: Convict them. The Holy Ghost shall reprove the world of sin, convict the world of sin. Do not hold any conversation with the unfruitful works of darkness; have nothing to do with them; repel them when they come near you, shrink away from them as if some horrible plague were in the air and you were afraid of being blighted by the fatal pestilence. Now we have escaped all that, and we have come to the age of toleration, and we call tolera-

tion charity, and thus we unwed that holy bride, and tear her away from righteousness and justice, and drive her out into the wilderness to talk an alien tongue. We have now great toleration for people who are of a contrary persuasion to our own; we compromise with the works of darkness; the day says to the night, Let us say no more about our differences, but let us compromise in a neutral tint or tone of colour, and let us lay down the noble democratic doctrine that one thing is as good as another in its own sphere, and if taken in its own atmosphere and in its proper relationships to the universe at large. So we are feeble, we are a school of cripples, we are a home of incurables; we have lost the nerve, the muscle, the tremendous energy that moved the world some centuries ago. We now live comfortably with all our opponents, and with regard to divers social practices we have compromised upon them; we come to church in the morning, and receive our friends in the afternoon, and slander the absentees over the cup which cheers but not inebriates. We used to go to church twice a day; now it is enough to get it over in the morning as early as possible, and then have the whole day—mayhap for “the unfruitful works of darkness.” Have we lost the sharpness of division? I am not now speaking about differences of opinion; opinion goes a short way in this great difference. This is not a matter of intellectual pedantry or ecclesiastical persuasion as to this form or that form: questions upon which men may honestly or even profitably differ. I am speaking about moral antagonisms, about God and the devil; and they cannot compromise; we belong to one or the other, we cannot serve God and Mammon: not the “cannot” of inconvenience, but the “cannot” of a transcendental necessity; the thing cannot be done. The Apostle Paul operated upon this grand doctrine of separation: Come out from among them, said he, and be ye separate; and he said he was speaking the word of the Lord; for what fellowship hath light with darkness? So he is consistent with himself in writing to the Ephesians and the Corinthians. Division, separation of a moral and spiritual kind, leaving all our necessary and not wholly unhappy differences of mere opinion to settle themselves; but the moral and immoral cannot sign the same document;

they do not serve the same king; their souls are different, they are irreconcilable.

Then in verse 15 he says, "not as fools," then the inevitable "but." What a series of "not" and "but"! "Not as fools, but as wise." Fools is a word of many meanings in the Scripture: senseless, nouseless, having no shrewdness of mind, having no moral sensitiveness, confusing things that differ, making mistakes and thinking nothing of them, as to their moral value and their relationship to the remaining links and duties of life. Sometimes the "fool" means the withered heart; the intellect is there, sharp enough, shrewd enough, trying to live upon its own problems and its own rude guesses at life's conundrums; but the heart is gone. It has faded like a leaf, it has withered like a leaf that falls from a branch that seems to shake it down with contempt. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God": not the intellectual fool, but the withered heart, the heart that is desiccated, juiceless, pithless, that which is leather which was once flesh, the heart in its withered late autumnal days says, There is no God. And to the withered heart what God can there be? Is not the heart the man at his best? does it not mean not only sensibility and tenderness and sympathy and all the words that belong to the line of high sentiment? Is not the heart the home of the man, the innermost sanctuary and altar of the soul? The heart sees, the heart becomes the noblest intellect; the heart under the right conditions will see more of God than the mere brain can ever see. Hear this word that comes through all the winds that blow through the ages, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." And sometimes the heart is the whole man; it is so in the first and great commandment of the law: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy spirit"—with all thy mind: the heart will recover the brain; the heart will go out after the prodigal intellect and bring it back. Some may only be doubters intellectually; they are not doubters, but believers in the great necessities and sorest agonies of life; then they suddenly change their creed, and remember that away down in the heart's deepest places there lives not a creed, but a faith, a

creating, redeeming, God-appropriating faith, which is itself the very creation of divine grace.

Yet again in verse 17, "not unwise"; then the inevitable "but"—"but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Getting at the very centre of things; not living the little superficial life, but connecting the mind and the heart with the upper fountains and the ever-springing wells of the divine conception and the divine purpose. "Not unwise"; living from day to day; not seeing the connection of things, and not noticing that an increasing purpose runs through all the process of suns and stars, of all bodies solar, geologic, and other; not knowing that the whole conception is in the grip of God, that the Lord reigneth, that the fog is but for a moment, that the blue light and the everlasting morning will come, and in its glory we shall forget the night and cease to remember that we were once troubled by a cloud.

To what a great character does the Apostle call us in setting before us this series of *not* and *but*! He is talking as only a great spiritual statesman can talk. A passage like this is a great educational lesson to the soul. Everything is balanced, mutually related, and impregnated by the very spirit of humanity and of divinest love. To have read such a passage is to have incurred a great responsibility; how much greater does that responsibility become when we read the concluding or climacteric "not" and "but" in the eighteenth verse, "not drunk with wine . . . but"—the same style of argument—"filled with the Spirit," drunk with the Spirit, intoxicated and made enthusiastic by divine possession and inspiration. What insight into human nature! "Be not filled with wine, drunk with wine, wherein is excess." Upon that excess we soon come; first there is exhilaration, and then there is a higher degree of buoyancy, and then there is a taste of bitterness, and then there is a sense of surfeit, and then a sense of revulsion, and an act of revulsion; you have reached the limit of the wine; wine can go so far and no farther. But as to the Holy Spirit, be drunk with that Spirit, that holy wine; be intoxicated and transported by that high revelry and that noblest ecstasy, in which there is no

satiety, no excess, no surfeit; for the mind grows by what it feeds on, and our capacity to receive the Spirit enlarges as we bid Him welcome to the hospitality of our love. There is a whole volume of philosophy in that eighteenth verse. All limited things will surfeit you, only the infinite will never cloy you. Why? Because you yourselves are meant to be immortal, you are intended to live with God, and in that life there is no monotony, no sense of weariness, but as we company with Christ we increase in desire to have further association still. I speak concerning Christ and His Church; no man can enter into this mystery but the man who lives and moves and has his being in God; he is never alone, he is never satiated; why, the water of Jacob's well would not be enough for him, he would drink of it and thirst again; but he who drinks of the water that Jesus Christ gives, he who drinks of the Holy Spirit, shall never thirst, and never know the meaning of satiety, but will evermore call upon the Lord to increase his faith that he may at once increase his service and his joy.

These are wonderful contrasts. Now we must go back a little upon our track here and there to pick out some peculiar words that seem to fit this mechanism of expression with exquisite adaptation. Quote a few of these remarkable words. Verse 9, "The fruit of the Spirit." Better translated as it is in the Revised Version, "the fruit of light." "Walk as children of light," we read in verse 8; in verse 9 the Apostle adopts a connective or logical word, and says, "For (because) the fruit of light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth; showing us what is acceptable unto the Lord." There is no more any darkness. The apple trees will not respond to great masses of gloom and cloud; there is no heroic little bird blithe enough to face the overpowering fog with even one little cheery note; no daisy or violet will come out to see the fog. But light makes all things come out; you cannot stop at home when it is light; light scatters them and yet unites them; light creates a common joy and a common sympathy, and people who never saw one another before are almost inclined to speak when the sun is doing its very best to make the earth merry and glad as with

a new song. So long as we remain in darkness we shall bear no fruit; when we come out by the power of the Spirit into light there will be bud and blossom and shaking fruit. May no blight or cruel wind from the east discourage such buddings and outbursts of the vernal juice!

And then we read in the eleventh verse of "the unfruitful works of darkness." What did they all come to? When we were really bad men what did it come to when it was all totalled up in results? What did it come to? To loss of virility, to loss of reason, to paralysis of will, to the divestment of our best nature; it came to fear and trembling and self-accusation and beasthood; that is what it came to. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? The bad man gets nothing; he thinks he makes a good bargain; he utters the fool's laugh at the devil's counter; and says what a wonderful arrangement he has made. And then come disappointment, social distrust, newspaper reports, halings before the courts; and then there may come more wine, a deeper draught of the devil's fluid to drown the devil's accusations; and then when it is all added up what does it come to? what the bill? Hell!

The Apostle urges us to walk as children of light, making his argument, in verse 13, run according to this line, "whatsoever doth make manifest is light," and light in three points, light almost in three qualities: light at the centre, which illumines the whole man; light that discovers, throws itself upon objects and discovers them. The sun discovers, not creates the dust. You think the room has been well cared for; so it may have been: will you draw up the blind and let the sun be critic? And when he comes in with those eyes of light you are ashamed of the very room you were proud of an hour ago. And then there is a light that reflects, the mirror light, that throws back, so that you can see yourself in the light and abhor yourself, never before having seen your disfigurement and your unworthiness and your utter decrepitude and miserable infirmity.

The Apostle gives the Ephesians a new word in

verse 15 : " See that ye walk circumspectly." It is a hard world to walk in at all ; we need to have eyes in front and eyes behind and eyes on either side of us ; because the enemy is watching us, and we are walking along a very narrow wall ; on the top of that wall are sharp points of glass made as if in the cement, and we must walk very carefully, or we shall be undone. We walk along a very narrow precipice, we cannot turn round to speak to a companion or fellow-traveller ; we say we must be perfectly silent till we get across this difficult place. Before you start on the journey look well round, be circumspect — roundabout-lookers — exactly to see where you are and to what point you are moving. Do not live the careless life or the rootless life or the planless life, taking things just as they come and being unwise, and foolish with exceeding folly ; but enter into calculation, relate one thing to another, and be wise in the Spirit of God, and let the word of Christ dwell in you richly that you may know how to answer the enemy, how to light a glory in the darkness, how to sing a song in the wilderness.

" Redeeming the time." The day of the Lord was always coming to Paul ; the day of the Lord is always coming to us. We are to walk and work, to serve, to suffer, as if the day of the Lord would be to-morrow. He indicated a grand policy, he did not execute an arithmetical exercise ; he did not sit beside the ticking pendulum, and say, Tell me when the Lord will come. To that have we brought our studies of the Scripture ! whereas the Apostle indicates a grand policy. This was a favourite philosophy of his, to get hold of the policy, and let the details relate themselves to it ; and part of the Pauline policy was this, that the Lord may be expected at any moment. And there is no other wise way of living. Ye know not the hour that ye may know it ; not to know it is to expect it, not to know it is to be solemnised by it. " The kingdom of heaven is at hand," said He who began to preach, and then finished by dying that He might afterwards rise from the dead and show how near His kingdom is. But so slow of heart are we that we want to know days and hours ; we have our slate and our

pencil, and if a prophet but drop a word that is arithmetical, we take him down in a moment, and if an apostle should indicate anything like a day, we begin to calculate and put another figure to it. By figures you can prove everything; by figures you can prove nothing. It is very sad indeed that men who have slates and pencils gave many of us a sleepless week this month by looking for meteors that never came, so far as I am aware. Personally, I did not care whether they came or not, but there was a great inroad made upon my sleep: they might be there, and I ought to rise and see if they have come after all. Better redeem the time, better turn the sunshine into labour, better serve the Lord with simplicity and honesty and godly fear, and then we shall be ready for Him when He does come. Convinced am I that this is a policy of the Apostle, and not the indication of an arithmetical expectation. "Ye know not what hour your Lord cometh." Christ Himself said so. What I say unto one, I say unto all, Watch. The kingdom of heaven comes every moment to the man who wants it, and asks to see in the coming of his Lord the way to a new opportunity, to suffer bravely, to work wisely, and to serve with the gratitude and the grace of a spiritual obedience.

WORDS FOR PREACHERS.

Blots appear fouler in a strict life than a loose one: no man wonders at the swine's wallowing; but to see an ermine mired is prodigy.—*Felltham*, 1668.

Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine, and lest you lay such stumbling blocks before the blind as may be the occasion of their ruin; lest you may unsay that with your lives, which you say with your tongues; and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labours. It much hindereth our work, when other men are all the week long contradicting to poor people in private, that which we have been speaking to them from the word of God in public; because we cannot be at hand to manifest their folly: but it will much more hinder if we contradict ourselves, and if your actions give your tongue the lie, and if you build up an hour or two with your mouths, and all the week after pull down with your hands! This is the way to make men think that the word of God is but an idle tale, and to make preaching seem no better than prating.—*Baxter*, 1615-1691.

It is not a very likely thing that the people will regard much the doctrine of such men, when they see that they do not live as they preach. They will think that he doth not mean as he speaks, if he do not as he speaks. They will hardly believe a man that seemeth not to believe himself. If a man bid you run for your lives because a bear or an enemy is at your backs, and yet do not mend his pace himself in the same way, you will be tempted to think that he is but in jest, and there is really no such danger as he pretends. When preachers tell people of a necessity of holiness, and that without it no man shall see the Lord, and yet remain unholy themselves, the people will think they do but talk to pass away the hour, and because they must say somewhat for their money, and that all these are but words of course. Long enough may you lift up your voices against sin before men will believe that there is any such harm or danger in it as you talk of, as long as they see the same man that reproacheth it, to put it in his bosom and make it his delight. You rather tempt them to think that there is some special good in it, and that you dispraise it as gluttons do a dish which they love, that they may have it all to themselves. As long as men have eyes as well as ears, they will think that they see your meaning as well as hear it; and they are more apt to believe their sight than their hearing, as being the more perfect sense.—*Baxter*, 1615-1691.

PRAVER.

GOD is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble ; therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. We will say, Why art thou disquieted within me ? O my soul, why art thou troubled with unrest ? There is a river the streams whereof make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. There is a still small voice after all the tribulation and thunder and destroying tempest ; that whisper of love shall find our hearts ; Thou wilt not break the bruised reed, Thou wilt not quench the smoking flax. Thou hast given unto Thy Son the tongue of the learned, that He may speak a word in season unto him that is weary. If Thou dost overthrow us by Thy thunder, Thou dost gather us again with Thy speaking tender love. God is love ; before the wrath and after the wrath shall we see the love of God. We bless Thee for Thy Sabbath day, the day of days, the morning of rest and hope and song and joy ; Thou hast been careful of the days, Thou hast made one of them Thine own jewel. This is the day the Lord hath made ; we will rejoice and be glad in it. We come into Thy courts with praise and with loud sweet songs, and we approach Thee in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, the promised Messiah that should redeem humanity. We pray in no other name ; it is enough ; He ever liveth to make intercession for us, and to multiply our prayers by His own solicitude and by His own love. Grant unto us a day of rest, a high festival day ; may we order off all lower things, all mean enjoyments, all cups which exhilarate and then destroy ; for one sweet short day may we live the upper life, may we be fed with corn from heaven and eat angels' food. Thou knowest how easily tempted we are to the lower levels of life, how any fool can stop our prayer and substitute his song for Thine. Oh ! that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would consider their latter end, that they would make diligent search into Thy will and Thy purpose, and serve Thee with deepening reverence and holy, filial, tender fear : then would all the week be a minor festival, all work would be sanctified by the Sabbatic song. Oh ! that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would not waste their time, that they would not degrade their vocation and election in God, but for one day might stand on the mountain top and feed at the table where there is no satiety. We have come to thank Thee for all Thy love during the week ; if we have played the fool, it is because we are still in the body ; if we have

turned away to other altars, it is because we are utterly foolish in our heart, so small, so vain, so weak. But in this moment of consideration and deepest sobriety of spirit we remember our evil natures, our wasted days, our ignorant wisdom and our foolish talk. Oh ! that men were wise, that they understood these things, that they would be men indeed, made in the image and likeness of God and redeemed with the blood of Christ, the precious blood, the blood infinitely precious. We have come to the tower from whose windows we can see afar ; we have come to the temple of God, and out of its windows we can behold the landscapes afar off ; and whilst we tarry under the sacred roof we hear voices of welcome and gladness and inspiration. Seeing these things, and obeying these voices, behold, the whole week shall lie under our feet like a conquered thing, and we shall be no longer slaves of time and space and limitation. Thou hast not neglected one day, Thy love has kissed us every morning, every night Thy fingers have drawn down our eyelids that we might enjoy refreshing slumber ; behold, the angels have spread our table and replenished our cup of water, and Thou hast given us corn from heaven and angels' food ; therefore are we strong, exuberant, full of passionate yet sober joy. Thou hast rocked the cradle, Thou hast blessed us in basket and in store ; Thou hast comforted the sad, Thou hast given the ill and the dying a new lease of life ; and we have come in memory of these things to praise Thee in a common psalm, and to seek Thy blessing in the name of Christ in a common supplication. We pray for one another : for the old man, for the little child, for the weary pilgrim, for those to whom life is a daily fight, and for those who are in danger of losing God by reason of the abundance of His blessings. May Thy harvests never quench Thine existence, may we never be blinded by Thy goodness to forget Thyself ; the Lord help us to remember that He reigns over all things, and guides our lives, and will be with us in the eleventh hour, and when the twelfth hour doth strike we shall see the Lord's face in the Lord's heaven. Look upon the earth, we humbly pray Thee, upon our kings and queens our mighty men and councillors, our wise leaders and thoughtful writers, and upon all persons who would lead us in the upper and better way. The Lord burn the chariot in the fire, the Lord put an end to war ; the Lord work out His own purposes in His own way ; and may we have confidence in God and stand in that confidence as men might stand in an impregnable fortress. Pity the bereaved and the sorrowing ; touch the broken heart with Thine own healing balm ; plant some flowers around the grave ; and may all life be offered to Thee in the name of Jesus at the foot of the Cross as a living sacrifice. Amen.

LV.

SOUL FOOD.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 3RD, 1899.

"Corn of heaven. . . angels' food."—PSALM lxxviii. 24, 25.



WHAT do you live upon? How many lives have you? Who is the sustainer of your life? In what direction do you look for daily sustenance? Surely here in these two texts, which are in reality one text, we find exactly what man needs at his best estate—"corn of heaven, angels' food." Is such sustenance available? Yes. Are there any invitations to partake of this food? Certainly; invitations given as with the blast of trumpets to come and eat, to come buy wine and milk without money and without price. The Lord reasons with people who are sitting at the wrong tables and partaking of the wrong food, and points out to them that their souls can never flourish on such mean viands. But who thinks of eating anything for his soul's health? Man thinks of his body, he must have his meals regularly, he would complain were there any breach of regularity; but what of his soul? Who seriously, not occasionally, but seriously and continuously, thinks of feeding his best life? Who is there that does not in some way suppose that his best life must take care of itself? Feed the body, and let the soul do what it can in its own interests, is the mean creed of many a man who would be shocked if he were charged with being an atheist.

What do we live upon? Here is corn from heaven, here is angels' food, and we may perhaps never touch it. Let it not be supposed that God is responsible for our self-improvement; He never meant us to impoverish ourselves, He never meant us to attempt to satisfy our hunger with the husks that the swine do eat; He never meant us to be swine; if we are

swine we are self-made, self-degraded, we have dishonoured the image and likeness of God. And what you eat comes out in your face, in your skin, in your eyes; your food expresses itself in daily incarnations. It is possible to eat nothing but flesh, and to make flesh of it; it is possible to eat nothing but what the beasts may eat, and to make it no better than they make it. On the other hand, it is possible to eat viands meant for the body, and to turn those viands into poetry, inspiration, benevolence, charity, grace. How much good food is wasted on some people! The food was sufficient in quantity and it was excellent in quality, but it was unblessed food, therefore it came to nothing, fatness of flesh and leanness of soul; petted bullocks are some men.

It was God who gave Israel in the wilderness corn of heaven and angels' food; it was so to say doubly of heaven and doubly angels' food, because it was given in the wilderness; it was such a contrast, it was evidently a thing that could not be grown by the wilderness; it was something that had come into the wilderness and come into the wilderness from above. Yet it is possible for the devil so to deprave and thwart the imagination and the conscience of men as to make them believe that it was the wilderness that grew the corn and the very rocks that provided the angels' food. Man can be stupid; man is brilliantly clever in degrading and depraving things. I would not trust him with the stars; he would break them up, scatter them, take out their light and sell it. Lord, keep him on the ground out of which his body came, lest he spoil Thy universe! Whatever man touches he degrades. When he builds, nature begins to take off the roof before the man has wholly put it on. When man plucks a flower, the flower is dead at once; you cannot pluck and keep the flower. Let the Lord shut down this little all-spoiling sprite and keep him within his cage until he is fit for larger liberty. You can tell what a man has been feeding upon by looking at his face, by listening to his voice, by watching the light of his eyes, by hearing his proposals, by consulting him in perplexity, by asking him to step into the silence of the shadow of the chamber of affliction; then his

meat will come out of him, a vulgarity or a poem, a degradation or an instruction ; he will show at whose table he has been eating when he tries to comfort over the dead body of husband, wife, child ; such food as he has been eating, and such food eaten in such a spirit as his, can never be turned into a benediction, it goes into corruption. That is the apostolic word ; it sinks into rottenness and putridity. Ay, the wheat, so golden, which was grown on the fields under God's sunshine, may become nothing but despair and cursing ingratitude and red shame. Do not eat unblest bread. You can ask a blessing upon it in silence ; you need not subject yourself to the sneer of the enemy by asking the blessing aloud, but you can make every mouthful of bread sacramental, and every drop out of the cup you may drink as if it were red blood ; then we shall see the food in your shining face, and hear it in your tender voice, and feel it in your masonic grip, and know it by your willingness to impart its strength to others.

What a wonderful psalm this is ! God had done all sorts of beautiful and lovely things for this people Israel, and here He brings an indictment against the children of the wilderness. When God had piled gift upon gift, they sinned yet more against Him by provoking the Most High, and they tempted God in their heart, and they asked meat for their lust. They wanted bread to turn it into passion, they wanted flesh to turn it into devil. Beware of these subtle and almost unconfessed degradations of daily blessings ; beware of tempting God to work miracles to gratify human passion. That passion may be intellectual, imaginative, artistic, or it may be sensual, and the lowest of the low desires. This wonderful psalm shows the absolute futility of mere miracles. God seems to have worked all His miracles in this seventy-eighth psalm ; it is as full of miracles as the Lord's sermons were full of parables. Yet all ended in a deeper atheism ; not an atheism as we understand the word, a term emptied of God, but a term so filled with gods as to dethrone God. The Israelites were not nominal atheists. Would God there were more nominal infidels to-day ! more nominal pledged and badged atheists, that we might know them in the

streets and feel their hot breath the moment the door of hospitality opened; then we would know into what hell we were going. But it is possible to have eaten bread of sacrament, and to leave God in the church where we paid no heed to Him. We are fast coming to this. Then we wonder that we do not win our wars. We ought not to win them,—impious hounds, churchgoing hounds, creed-loving hounds, and yet devil-worshipping devotees! Yes, the casualties will be more and more, for the nation has cast off its Redeemer, and gone to selfishness and folly and madness, and it deserves to be crushed.

These people in the wilderness tempted God to do another miracle, and then another, and at last miracles became commonplaces to them, ceasing to be miracles and sinking below mere anecdotes or transient circumstances. Let us get back to the idea that God is the sustainer of man, God is the bread-giver; let us go back to our little child-prayer, Give us this day our daily bread. That prayer will do more for the world than atheism has ever done; that prayer will keep the world sweet when many a vain intellectual theory will pervert its imagination and destroy its conscience.

“Corn of heaven, angels’ food.” Let the imagery stand for all that it really means. We cannot take out of it the idea that bread and water and honey and locusts and all the old wilderness fare may be so accepted and utilised as to become as if it were corn of heaven and angels’ food. Surely it was angels’ food in the most literal sense that Adam ate when he was in the Garden of Eden.

“Now morn, her rosy steps in th’ eastern clime
Advancing, sow’d the earth with orient pearl,
When Adam waked, so custom’d for his sleep
Was aery light, from pure digestion bred,
And temperate vapours bland.”

So sang Milton of the first Adam. A wondrous life that—first and second—when Adam bathed into pearl, and sat on the river banks, watching the sunset shine upon Pison, as it shone on the land of gold. Then came the forbidden tree, the interdicted fruit, and the apples sour, and the grapes that held

in them the good wine took into themselves the devil's spirit and tore the drinker as if possessed by demons. We have got away from that long-ago simplicity; we shall be wise in the degree in which we endeavour to get back to it. Eat no unblessed bread; it will come out on you in blotches, in leprous spots, in drunken pimples, in all manner of physical degradation and shame; have nothing to do with such bread; a blessed crust means a feast; a blessed water-bottle, the bottle just filled from the running rill, means the true wine. Then there will be no poverty. The mental mood lifts up the whole life above the physical circumstances. Poverty is unknown to the good; poverty is not in the vocabulary of the man who truly prays. We have made a kind of clay poverty, a poor cold chill and chilling idol, that we gather around with our ignorant nostrums. The life that is hid with God in Christ knows nothing about poverty, and could receive no explanation of it; it is a language not unknown only, but unknowable.

Are we sustained by the living God? Do we live upon God? Do we understand how many kinds of food or elements of sustenance God can give to us? Jesus Christ revealed the great philosophy of living; He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone." The meaning is so often mistaken or perverted, as if the passage read, Man must have something more than bread, he must have something to his bread, it will not do to give him mere bread, bare bread. The passage has no such poor drivelling meaning. Here is a great philosophy of sustenance; man shall not live only by bread, as if there were only one way of living, as if there were only one method of keeping man together in his personal identity. God can feed a man on the rocks or in the air or on the sea, away from civilisation wholly. God can so sustain His own dear child that the child shall have no physical want, he shall be for forty days and forty nights away in the wilderness or on the mountain top, and hunger shall return to him as a forgotten consciousness. When men rightly live in God the world will be at rest, and not until then. There is no way of rightly living in God but through Jesus Christ His Son. That is the

Gospel message ; that is the evangelical doctrine ; and, sirs, clever men, dreamers, conjurers, programme-makers, that is true when all your frivolity is blown away.

Jesus Christ explained all this so beautifully when He spake in John vi. 32. He speaks of being the true vine. "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven, but My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." And that so touched the imagination, the pathos, the conscious necessity of man, that those who heard the words cried out, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." That should be the exclamation of every audience at the close of every evangelical exposition and appeal. But audiences make no response now ; they die of decorum, they rot in indifference ; there are no echoes now, or few. Jesus said, I am the bread which came down from heaven, and they say, How can this man be the bread which came down from heaven ? we know His father and His mother, and we know all about Him, and He saith He is the bread that cometh down from heaven. "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life ; and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father : so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me. This is that bread which came down from heaven : not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead : he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever." And the poor literalists, as all literalists will down to the end of the age, said, How can this man give us His flesh to eat ? They were what we call rationalists ; they said in effect, You see, it stands to reason ; there is a limited body, here is an unlimited population, and the population of the world will go on from age to age, and this man says that only by eating His flesh can we enter into the

kingdom of heaven ; why, it stands to reason—— O that shamed reason, that ill-judged and ill-treated reason ! There is a reason that grows into faith, and faith belongs to infinity. We are saved by faith. The literalist says, You have the bread laid on your sacramental plates, and you call this the flesh of Christ ; some call it God, some say it is transubstantiated from the material into the spiritual and into the divine ; why, it stands to reason—— It does not ; your reason is not reason ; you are a literalist, you are a little slave of the little alphabet ; you know nothing yet about the kingdom of heaven. In a crumb of bread there may be the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost symbolically represented, and it may be accepted by faith as a great sacrament. Do not live, if you please, by your so-called reason. That is a poor light ; I would not trust it. Faith is the Christian word ; if you want a literary word, I will give you the word imagination, fancy, great power of transmutation and symbolisation. When we eat the sacramental bread we do not eat the literal flesh, but we eat by faith, we partake of a grand symbolical element, and we partake of it symbolically, and it is to us as the flesh of Christ, and the wine is as the blood of His heart.

Have we eaten of the living bread ? Have we partaken of the Son of God ? Do we accept the Lord Christ as our Saviour, our only Saviour, our only because our sufficient and eternal Saviour ? Then our daily bread is blessed by that acceptance ; the poor flesh bread that we eat at home by which we seek to stave off the gnawing of bodily hunger, even that bread becomes sacramental, symbolic, indicative. All other eating is waste ; a waste that may end in momentary cleverness, and in a sufficiency of income, but when added up and appreciated at the last, the word waste will be the right word. Hence said the dear Christ, Father, I have kept all but one, and that one is the son of waste,—not the word perdition, as we understand that word ; I have lost none but the son of waste ; I would have saved him if I could, but he is the child of waste, he has withered away, there was nothing in him that could grow up into life ; Father, I have lost him.

WORDS FOR PREACHERS.

The snuffers of the tabernacle were of pure gold : they who reprove and snuff the vices of others had need themselves to be free from those sins. The snuffers must be of gold.—*Watson*, 1696.

The minister's miscarriage is dangerous to the people ; therefore pray for them, lest you be led into temptation by their falls. The sins of teachers, are the teachers of sin. If the nurse be sick, the child is in danger to suck the disease from her that lies at her breast ; if the minister be tainted with an error, it is strange if many of his people should not catch the infection ; when, if he be loose and scandalous in his life, he is like a common well or fountain, corrupted and muddied, at which all the town draw their water. The devil aimed at more than *Peter* when he desired leave to try a fall with him : "*Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to winnow thee.*" He knew his fall was like to strike up the heels of many others. The minister's practice makes a greater sound than his doctrine ; they who forget his sermon, will remember his example to quote it for their apology and defence when time serves. *Peter withdraws, and other Jews dissembled with him* (Gal. ii. 12-13).—*Gurnall*, 1617-1679.

In your study acquaint yourself with the Word of God. That which may pass for diligence in a private Christian's reading and search into the Scripture, may be charged as negligence upon the minister. The study of the Scriptures is not only a part of our general calling (in common with him) but of our particular also ; in which we are to be exercised from one end of the week to the other. The husbandman doth not more constantly go forth with his spade and mattock to perform his day labour in the field, than the minister is to go and dig in this mine of the Scripture. He is not to read a chapter now and then, as his worldly occasions will permit, or steal a little time from his other scholarly studies to look into the Bible *in transitu*, and bid it farewell : but it must be his standing exercise, his plodding work ; all other must stoop to this. Suppose thou shouldst know what *Plato*, *Aristotle* (with the rest of the *Princes* of worldly learning) have writ, and hadst incircled all the *arts* within thy circumference, but art unskilful in the Word of righteousness, thou wouldst be *Paul's unlearned* person ; as unfit to be a minister as he that hath read all the body of the *law* is to be a *physician*, if ignorant of this *art*.—*Gurnall*, 1617-1699.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we bless Thee for the great Exemplar ; we thank Thee for the Lord Christ, God manifest in the flesh, Emmanuel, God with us. May we make Him our example, may we copy none other ; as He loved, so may we love ; as He suffered, so may we suffer ; may we make no reference to ourselves, but always refer to the great Saviour, the Christ of God. Then will everything be unto us as it was unto Him ; enduring the Cross, we shall despise the shame ; accepting the discipline, we shall look beyond and see the crown, and hear the final hymn. May Christ dwell in our hearts by faith ; may He rule our whole life ; then shall our temper be sweet, our considerateness for others shall be full of tenderness ; we shall bend over the sick with sympathy, and help the helpless with an open and generous hand. It is the Christ we want, the indwelling Saviour, the all-ruling and all-subduing Cross ; then everything will come easy to us, and we shall know what it is to carry a burden that is light and a yoke that is easy. We thank Thee for making all things so plain to us in Christ Jesus the Lord ; we bless Thee that Thou dost not call us to any ventures on our own behalf or to any inventions of new and untried moralities ; we thank Thee for the eternal temple in which we may hear the heavenly song and for the balances by which we may test all our doings and thoughts, our motives and purposes. We thank Thee for the fine gold ; may we examine all pretended gold by its light and according to its quality ; then shall we be men and women of solid character, high uprightness, noble magnanimity, and men shall take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus. Amen.

LVI.

EPHESIANS v. 19-22.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 7TH, 1899.

“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord ; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”



IVE the thankful life. Let us have no more groaning and complaining, but let us have music and psalm and hymn and spiritual song, an inward and outward melody. The Church has forgotten all its exhortations to thankfulness and to music ; it has made for itself a series of threnodies very depressing and soul-enslaving, services and tests of discipline and standards of heartless and often hypocritical solemnity. The Apostle says, Let us have no more of this ; there is a sunny side even to Christian faith ; there are whole days, long bright summer days, in which it becomes us to sing one to another in psalm and hymn and spiritual song and to match the summer with a human melody. We are not the more pious because we are so depressed ; melancholy is not one of the evidences of the Christian faith ; as well refer to death in proof that we are members of the kingdom of heaven. We have nothing to do with death ; it is abolished, sponged out ; our subject is the resurrection. When the Church is more cheerful it will depose the world from many a position of social charm and fascination to which it has no right whatsoever. Do we contribute towards a cheerful Church ? Did you ever know any church that was really rationally and consistently vivacious and triumphant because of the nearness of the Saviour and because the air was made balmy by His presence and blessing ? Let a cheerful life be added to the evidences of the truth of the Christian

religion. Paul was never ashamed of his overflowings of joy; he mingled the cup of life so dexterously and with so sweet and sacred a cunning that no man ever drank such a cup as Paul drank; he said, Yea, we glory in tribulations also. Nothing could repress him or depress him; his religion forced its way through fog and smoke and storm and pain and loss; he took tribulation with a strong man's hand, and added it to his wealth. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Always hear the music that is in everything. There is fire in ice; there is music in silence, there is music in the radiance of the face. Music is not a noise; music is an expression, a spiritual emphasis, a force within which makes all outward things palpitate as if in obedience to some fascinating charm. It would be better for us to have psalm and hymn and spiritual song than to have groaning and unbelief and fear and timidity. The heart should be so full of music as to leave no room for the devil. What the Apostle cautioned the Romans against was a void mind; a mind empty, idle, and either having nothing to do or being unwilling to do anything; that is the devil's chance! We hear a good deal about our temptations and difficulties and struggles. Silence! We want to hear something now about the psalm and hymn and spiritual song, and the triumph and domination in the infinite strength of the infinite grace. We are cautioned not to give way to depressing influences. Our singing spiritually with the right fervour and emphasis will keep the devil at bay. He hates all singing hearts; music tortures the damned spirit. If you had more music you would have less fear. Not mechanical music, not something that can be taught at a certain number of pence per half-hour; that is not the music meant by the Apostle Paul; it is melody in the heart, it is the whole life itself turned to music. The devil does not get very near to the heart that lives in real thankfulness and in spiritual melody. When we live in argument, he asks us questions; when we try to sustain the soul on controversy, he puts before us in a most skilful, almost professorial manner the heresies of old centuries, and asks us what we make of them; as if long ago we had not buried them, and lost them and cursed them! You never

should attempt to make an ancient heresy a modern difficulty. There are many temptations to depression. Some of those temptations arise from physical constitution. Some persons never can be otherwise than depressed; other persons would really be unhappy if they had no depression; they would wonder what had taken place because they feel a little better this morning. These are not our living epistles and letters of commendation. At the same time we are called upon to be patient with people who are constitutionally melancholy. We should never marry them; we should live as little as possible with them; but with these two reservations, we should be as kind as we can be to them.

If we have had our psalm and hymn and spiritual song, what then, thou great disciplinarian of the Church? I will tell you, says Paul; after the song must come the discipline. You will find all along the Christian line that song and discipline alternate; they seem to balance one another; in that, as in the record of Genesis, the evening balances the morning, and the evening and the morning are the whole day. Discipline succeeds melody:—

“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.”

We shall miss the whole point of this if we take it out of its connection and make a jest of it. There are no jests in the Bible. The buffoon can find them on the altar, almost on the Cross, but the wise man finds no such thing. Observe the atmosphere in which the apostle is now writing; take note of the atmosphere which he has created around these Gentile converts. Do not place the Ephesian converts on a level with Christian and experienced nations. When the temperature is at the highest, when joy is at the zenith, when all the summer fruits are growing and all the summer birds are singing, he says, Submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God. And in that atmosphere it is easy to do so; in any other atmosphere it is impossible. That is the exposition. Where the atmosphere is right there will be no difficulty. What a cunning master of fence was this

great brother of ours, the leader of the Christian host! Said he, "Submitting yourselves one to another." That is the key of all that follows. The submission is never to be on one side only; and where there is submission on both sides there is no humiliation, there is sympathy, there is union. Everything depends upon the point at which we approach difficult subjects or severe trials. The difficulty is not so much in the thing itself as in the point from which we proceed towards it and the atmosphere with which we invest it. All things are affected by atmosphere. It is the atmosphere that makes the beauty of the summer day. The sun would be but a clumsy artist painting in white too dazzling if he had not the help of atmosphere; that is where he gets his pictures; and yet we call him the great artist; in a sense he is the great artist, but he has wonderful appliances, God has given to him very great assistances and auxiliaries; he would be but a poor glaring white-faced thing, a merely frightsome thing, in yonder courts of his, if he were not tempered and coloured and toned by that which no man ever saw, the air, the atmosphere, the mysterious something that clothes the earth like a garment, a garment invisible and yet full of a strange mystic colour.

For example, many persons are broken down in mid-life and made cripples of for the rest of their days because of the great difficulty about the miracles. There is no difficulty about the miracles. Yet you were broken down at thirty-five, and have never been yourself since, because some fool of a man suggested to you the difficulty of Jesus Christ walking on the sea, and raising the dead, and giving sight to the blind. That man made you a sort of initial, elementary, and most infantile infidel some thirty years ago. Would God some nobler spirit had been within your calling! The miracles, what are they? Everything depends upon the point of view from which they are surveyed, or the point in their own circumference at which they are broken in upon. Here and elsewhere the question is largely one of spiritual atmosphere. A poor little urchin brought up in a very depressing village, reared in a room seven feet by six, with a

window in it so high that he was never able to look out of it, is brought up to see some great city, and how affrighted he is, how terrorstruck, how amazed ! How will he ever get back again ? Here is a youth brought up in a large city, educated upon a liberal scale, accompanying with persons of culture and travel and large information ; how does he regard the city, even the city of London ? Without fear, with appreciation ; he has come down upon it from a high point ; the other visitor struggled up to it from the lowest possible point : do these people view the city in the same light and estimate it at the same value ? Certainly not ; they are two different people, they approach it from two totally different points of view. So if I come down from long accompanying with the Saviour in heaven ; if I have spent with Him forty days and forty nights ; if we have held long, sweet, deep, vital intercourse, I come down upon the world, and it is but a pebble-life ; I come down upon its wonders, and do not consider them worth looking at ; I have been with the Lord, and everything else must be mean, small, contemptible ; if I have made myself by grace and the holy action of the blessed Spirit familiar with the purposes of Christ, I shall approach the miracles of Christ as very little things, as He Himself approached them ; they were never great efforts to Jesus Christ ; He came from eternity, and time can never be great to Immortality. Jesus Christ said concerning His miracles in addressing His disciples, Greater works than these shall ye do, because I go unto the Father : the further I am from you, the nearer I am to you ; the leverage will be greater, all the apparatus and appliances, spiritual and metaphysical, will be more immediately under my command ; I go that I may come ; I vanish that I may be seen by the heart.

So with this matter of submission. " Submitting yourselves one to another." A man takes refuge in his vanity, in self-exaggeration, in overweening and overwhelming self-importance : how do you account for that ? Because he has come from a low communion, he has struggled up to this position ; he has not come down upon it, as an eagle might alight upon a rock ; so he asks why he should submit—he ! Was

ever little pronoun so loaded with false emphasis, so crushed by misinterpretation? He—a candle that a wind can blow out; he—a leaf that will fall with the winter wind blowing upon it; he—whose breath is in his nostrils; he—upon whose brain a cloud may descend at any moment, and he will grope at midday as if it were sevenfold night. He must approach himself from the right standpoint, he must come to himself from communion with God, and then he will understand what Jesus, the ever-blessed One, meant when He said, He that is greatest amongst you, let him be the servant of all. That is submission. Service is submission; help given to others out of a generous because regenerated heart is the sign and is the seal of a genuine submission. What is this wonderful submission? It is two persons doing the same thing at the same time to one another. Where is the submission? These acts are not consequent one upon another; they are concurrent; you bowed just as I was bowing, I submitted just as you submitted, and the finest mechanical or mathematical instrument ever discovered could not mark the point of coincidence. That is submission. There is nothing here of some high and mighty one waiting until some lowly and inferior one kisses his boots; there is no act of condescension on the part of some foolish person who does not understand himself or understand the discipline of life; there is no knavish trick in this. Observe the atmosphere in which we have been trained; we have been brought up to being filled with the Spirit, to singing with one another in hymn, psalm, spiritual song as unto the Lord; we have been taught to give thanks always for all things, unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: then “submitting”—part of the psalm! It may be the closing note of the rolling, the sonorous anthem. But we delight to tear these little sentences out of their place and to found theories upon them, so that some poor miserable preacher, of whom his mother might be ashamed, claims to be the head of the wife; a man who can hardly get out of bed in the morning; a man who has great difficulty in making bread enough to sustain his wife and family; a little, miserable, poorly-made toy of a man who is the head of the wife because he could not

make himself the head of anything else! That is not Christian teaching. The two are one; they submit themselves one to the other; how to be first in the act of submission is the great problem, the happy delightful enigma, which both the parties, if filled with the Spirit of Christ, can instantly and sufficiently answer and resolve.

You cannot lay down little rules upon any such matters of personal or household discipline. What then can we do? The Apostle has already told us—"Be filled with the Spirit." To rule without ruling, to lead without leading, to drive without cracking the whip, to be a man without being a fool; that is only possible when we are filled with the Spirit, when we are breathing the vital atmosphere, when we are one with Christ. There is a sovereign principle which simplifies and sanctifies the whole action, redeeming it from servility and lifting it up into a sacrament. What is that sovereign principle? Again and again it asserts itself in all these exhortations—"as unto the Lord," "as Christ," "even as the Lord of the Church." Christians, whether men or women, are never asked to do more than Christ did. That will solve everything. "Even as the Lord." Then again, "as Christ," and again, "as unto the Lord." It is not some little domestic claim; it is a living Christian principle. Does the wife do nothing, even for the most successful of men? She makes the income quite as much as he does; she sustains him, inspires him, lifts the burden from his shoulder, takes him to see some new vision, drops into his life some new note of music. I would not have a penny that my wife did not share and could not spend. She made it; I, a poor creature easily depressed and turned out of the way, whose only delight is that he can resign his position; and she, cheering, gladdening, inspiring, uplifting: to whom does the property belong? To her. When I told a certain half-grown old gentleman that my wife drew all the cheques without consulting me or troubling me about such documents, he said, "You must have great confidence in your wife." The wretch! Confidence in your wife! what a life without her! A nightmare, an awful intolerable misery. But these things cannot be regulated by

little laws and maxims. How then can they be regulated? I quote again the wholly sufficient answer, "Be filled with the Spirit, the Spirit of love." Love never thinks that anything has been given whilst anything has been withheld. Until, therefore, we are great in the Christian life, great in the conception of spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus, fore-ordained by the discriminating and loving wisdom of God, settled, rooted, grounded in Christ, we are not fit to have a house, we are not fit to handle the delicate and difficult problem of life. But if the word of Christ be in us and dwell richly in us there will be no difficulty; there will be music, there will be rest; and we shall say, poor man or great man, "Be it ever so humble, there is no place like home."

WORDS FOR PREACHERS.

Keep a clear conscience ; he cannot be a bold *reprover* that is not a conscientious *liver* : such a one must speak softly, for fear of awaking his own guilty conscience. He is like one that shoots with a foul piece ; his reproofs recoil upon himself. Unholiness in the preacher's life will either stop his mouth from *reproving*, or the people's ears from *receiving*. Oh, how harsh a sound does such a cracked bell make in the ears of his congregation ! “ Let the *righteous* smite me,” if any, is the language of all hearts.—*Gurnall*, 1617-1679.

A wicked minister, or parent, may be earnest with his people or family to mend, because they lose not their own sinful profits or pleasures by another's reformation, nor doth it call them to that self-denial as their own doth. But yet for all this, there is none of that zeal, resolution and diligence, as is in all that are true to Christ. They set not against sin as the enemy of Christ, and as that which endangereth their people's souls. A traitorous commander, that shooteth nothing against the enemy but powder, may cause his guns to make as great a sound or report as some that are laden with bullets ; but he doth no hurt to the enemy by it. So one of these men may speak loud, and mouth it with an affected fervency ; but he seldom doth any great execution against sin and Satan. No man can fight well, but where he hateth, or is very angry ; much less against them whom he loveth, and loveth above all.—*Baxter*, 1615-1691.

It is fabled of a madman, that, talking with a lean, meagre cook, he understood from him what dainty dishes he dressed for his guests ; and hearing that they were all fat and fair liking, and thrived with it, he asked him why he did not feed on those meats himself, that he might be fat too. The cook answered, that, for his part, he had no stomach ; but the madman replies, “ Take heed how thou come near Bedlam ; if the corrector find you, your punishment will be very sharp, for certainly, you are madder than ever I was.” Thus, it is no better than madness for ministers, magistrates, and others in place of eminency to give light to others, and walk themselves in darkness, to distribute portions of meat to the family and starve their own souls, to rescue others from the enemy and suffer themselves to be taken, to forewarn others of the pit whereinto themselves run headlong, to give good counsel to others and not to be guided by the counsel themselves.—*Otho Melander*.

PRAYER.

ALmighty GOD, show us Thy purpose, we humbly pray Thee, in our creation, preservation, and redemption. By Thy Holy Spirit, teach us that we are being taught and educated, day by day, till we come to be perfect men in Christ Jesus. Now we are imperfect, sometimes utterly infirm, unequal to the task of the day, and sometimes we feel that we are not utterly forsaken, that God is still with us, and that His purpose will be completed in the perfectness of our manhood. For every beam of light we thank Thee, for every voice of encouragement which penetrates our dejection and dispels it we bless the name of the Lord. Help us to believe that our education in Christ Jesus is Thy sovereign will, and that, being Thy sovereign will, Thou wilt surely bring it to its fullest accomplishment. There is much to deter us, there is much that is hostile and fierce and cruel ; enable us to believe that He who is with us is more than all that can be against us, and that through the power and the love and the grace of Christ we shall ultimately be more than conquerors. We bless Thee for all stimulus, for all spiritual encouragement, for daily sustenance ; Thou dost feed us with corn of heaven and with angels' food, and thus our souls are preserved though the enemy be strong. Look upon us in our low estate ; the clouds are thick, but Thy sunlight can penetrate them all ; desolation and sorrow are on every hand, but the comforts of God are not exhausted. We commend one another to Thy tender care. Oh send us some rose from Sharon, some lilies from the sheltered valley ! Amen.

LVII.

TILL AND UNTIL.

I.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 21ST, 1899.

"Till we all come——"—EPHESIANS iv. 13.



HE immediate point is not what we are coming to, but the fact that we are coming, and that something is coming to us, and that this double action is the secret of the inspiration, the culture, the strengthening of our innermost life. The text therefore is "till . . . until,"—the something that says, You have not finished yet; there is another hill to climb, and then you will see it; there is another stream to ford, and on the other bank of that stream you will see what flowers can grow, and how mean are all the plants on this side the river. Till the sunshine comes, till the heavenly band appears and sends its thundering anthem through the quivering sky; till then, hope on! You have not yet arrived, but you are proceeding, you are on the right road, and you have this little singing word to cheer you in all your climbing and in all your descending and in all your fighting and in all your sorrow, "until—!" It would be a most profitable study to collate all the main passages in which we have the music of this till and until, and we should rise from the perusal of the oracles satisfied that though we have yet much to do there is a climacteric point, there is a just-now-rising dawn, the many tints of which can just be seen over the highest hill. Blessed are the prophets, fore-runners who catch the first gleam of that morning light! They cannot keep the intelligence to themselves; there are some gospels that must be preached. When a man who is out far beyond us sees the first

rising of the light which the ages have been waiting for, he will cry, Come! the day has risen. Even selfishness could not stifle that gospel, mayhap because selfishness could never receive it. The reason that people do not receive the Gospel is because they do not know it, nor do they feel it; it is at present but an intellectual conception or a moral conjecture; it is a mere study in ethics. When the Gospel itself with all the heat of its own red blood gets into any of us we must preach the Gospel to every creature. Let us be thankful for the men who have gone ahead, the men who first see the morning. How long we have been waiting for it! It seems century after century as if the slumberer would never awake, yet now and again, from Genesis to Revelation, there comes a voice which says, Until! It may be to-morrow, it may be a century hence, but it will come, and what we have to do is to hold on until the dayspring break in all its soft radiance and its implied eternities of summer on the earth that has been so long moaning, waiting, and mingling its prayers with a large share of dejection and despondency.

The keyword, therefore, is till or until; the same word, the same idea, and that idea an idea of encouragement and assurance, a word to hide in the heart and to listen to in the darkness when there seems to be no "until," when there seems to be but one settled frown on the brow of time. Yet the custodians of God's decrees, the divinely appointed priests of the eternal ark, are enabled to hear the sweet word "until," and such men, unknown, mayhap despised, have kept the world alive.

Where does this word "till" or "until" occur? Where all the great words occur, as I have told you a thousand times. Where do all the great words occur? In the Book of Genesis; and you have never read it! I speak not to the few who are familiar with the Divine Word, but to the many who never read it. You do not read the Divine Word when you only read it in the letter. The Divine Word is not a letter, but a spirit; it is not written music, but music sung and music brayed out from brass and throbbed as it were on living drums. We must go to

Genesis for our first grand "until" (chapter xlix. 10). Jacob is dying, he knows that his life is slowly but certainly trickling away; he calls all his sons around him, and made such speeches as mortal man never made either before or since; and most of you have never read them! Never was such eloquence heard before; there are no forged climaxes, no mechanically built periods, no half-forgotten and hesitant recitations; but great, grand, flowing eloquence. When the patriarch came to his son Judah he waxed almost as eloquent as when he came to his son Joseph, but not altogether as eloquent. The old man was at his best when his hands as it were groped for the head of Joseph, but he was beautiful when he spake to Judah—Judah who bore an awful scar of unfaithfulness and badness, but which was much covered up, if not wholly healed, by processes of grace which only experienced souls understand. Said Jacob, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come." There is the "till" or the "until," the word of promise, the gleam of hope, the pledged morning. No man can tell us what "Shiloh" means; we have had the word in Hebrew and in Greek, and we have called around it a whole market-place of expositors, a whole gallery and sanhedrim of learned men, but they can make nothing really final out concerning all the wells and fountains and springs that are hidden in this word Shiloh. But there is a Christian acceptance of the term, which is sufficient for us. The ancient Jews, indeed, associated the name Messiah with the word Shiloh, and regarded them as practically interchangeable terms; but the ancient Jews did not know Messiah as we know Him; therefore we must attach a Christian interpretation to Shiloh, and find him in Bethlehem, and on Calvary, and on Olivet, and away yonder in the city of the temple of intercession. Enough for the present exposition that there was a promised Man, soul, light, song, something away in the ages beckoning on the human race and feeding it with corn of heaven. You cannot empty the ages, you cannot deplete the future. The future itself seems to be a term of welcome and hospitality and most generous promise. We can look at it from any point of view we choose, and yet the human

heart says, Your hope is in the future; to-morrow there may be One blessed among women who will give the world a Saviour, and you cannot shut out that "until"; you can modify it, mutilate it, pervert it, but there is the "until." There shall be an evil reign until he come whose right it is to sit upon the uppermost throne. This song of faith also sings in each individual heart. It is to-morrow that Shiloh will be here, it is in a week or two that we shall hear from the far-away places that will make us glad. Why, in one little month we shall hear tidings that will more than compensate us for all our sorrow and dismay and self-accusation. In a century the world will grow greener grass and the heaven will be clothed with a diviner blue. In five centuries who knows what the old earth will be? In a thousand years there may not be a grave in all the mould of the globe. It is because we have these great shining, singing promises that we are able to suffer the present; if this were all, we could not live another day. There are points of agony and of misery which would end our poor feeble existence if there were nothing beyond, if no Shiloh were preparing to come, if no sweet spring with vernal flowers were lingering by the blue Tyrranean sea. It is because we know that the Shiloh spring is coming that we can bear the darkness of these December days, which are hardly worthy to be called days at all. June and December could never talk about days, they would not understand one another; June has one lexicon and December another, which his dim eyes can hardly read. It is the Shiloh that is coming that keeps the world alive, and all the atheists and agnostics and scorners and mockers cannot keep out of view or out of the sphere of holy, happy influence this grand Shiloh idea. The child will be born, the man will grow, the king will ascend the throne, and then we shall know why the universe was created, and the explanation will be grand, solemn, sufficient.

Another "until" we find in Psalm lxxiii. 17, "Until I went into the sanctuary." Then I saw all about it. The sanctuary is the only place where you can see everything, Church or State, just as it is. You see nothing really until you see it from the

point of the altar. The religious soul, the soul that bathes itself in the stream of the divine wisdom and the divine light, is the greatest soul under heaven. All other souls are little pedlars compared with the religious soul that has the key of heaven, the entree of the hospitable skies. A poor man was sadly troubled because wicked people were prospering exceedingly: their gardens were full of flowers, and they had roses with next to no thorns on them, and they had herbs and oliveyards and vineyards and all manner of increase, yet they never sang a psalm, they never laid a tribute on God's altar. Their eyes were standing out with fatness, they had more than heart could wish; God was excluded from their whole imagination; and yet as to banking, as we should modernly call it, and commerce and prosperity, they had it all; and poor Asaph was hardly strong enough to carry his own harp. When he saw these almost beasts, certainly these minus men, his feet well nigh slipped, he was as nearly down flat on his back as ever a man was on treacherous ice. And then, having just strength enough to crawl into the sanctuary, he said in effect, What are all these lights? what is this I hear? what are these explanations that are rising in my mind? who speaks? who makes the night dead? if there was any audible voice able to make him hear this music beyond the merest outline and beginning. But thought came on thought, reflection followed upon reflection; Asaph put this together with that, and finally he said, I see it! behold, it was they who were set in slippery places, it was they who were as bullocks fattening in a succulent pasture: ay, thou didst train them and fat them for the knife: I see it now! We should see all things if we went into the sanctuary in their right proportion, because in their right perspective and their right light. We are so meddlesome, and we will discuss daily details, and we are first troubled by one man and then we are troubled by another, and then in the middle of the day there is a sure and certain lie that comes and perplexes us more than ever as to what we heard yesterday and heard this morning. Why can we not leave the detail alone? and why does every washerwoman suppose that she could

settle better than any statesman what ought to have been done in certain great national crises? Only in the sanctuary can we get the solution of all things. Sometimes that solution comes in the form of increased patience, a deepening sense of our dependence upon the living God. We do not always get an explanation in words and in grammatical phrases skilfully and mechanically piled into paragraphs which we can measure and understand. It is not always so that God works. Somehow in the sanctuary there is an atmosphere, as there is in the chamber of death. Tell me what is that weird, wondrous atmosphere that gets around the soul in the sight of the dead body. You are then really in the sanctuary, though not nominally so. The chamber of sickness may be a sanctuary; the chamber of your own closet where you offer secret prayer to God and commune silently with the Spirit may be the sanctuary. But in the ordinary signification of the term the sanctuary points to fellowship in worship, to a commonwealth of praise, to a common inheritance of grace—a great mystery, no doubt, but known well to those to whom God has given keys and promises and a sure word of prophecy. It is the religious man who should govern the State; it is the Church that should rule the empire. We have inverted things, and have gone to the market-place to understand what can only be explained in the sanctuary. But the day is coming when the sanctuary, the holy, redeemed, blood-bought Church of Christ, shall tell the world what to do.

We might call on our way in the house of Canticles, the house of the love-dreams, and there in chapter ii. 17 we shall read, "Until the day break and the shadows flee away." That is a grand "until." Is it possible that the sun can find his way through all the grey cold clouds of December? Is there a day promised? Will the day break? Who ever heard the gates of the morning creak as they swung back on their golden hinges? Who ever heard a tramping army bringing up the sun as if by strength of muscle? Who ever heard the stars make a noise? Yet through all this wondrous process of the suns there is a silent march, a silent incoming of the

Messianic period, and when the day breaks upon the grave, the grave shall be as a cradle; and when the day breaks on sorrow and sickness, failure, disappointment, and manifold misery, we shall see the whole sphere of life in its proper colours, relations, and proportions, and find that God has been busy in the darkness. God does wonderful things in the night time; what He has done in the sanctuary of densest darkness we shall never know till the shadows flee away; then we shall find that all the while He has been building a palace for us, a right glorious and royal house, and making things ready for our souls away beyond the humble paths of the stars which now we think a long way off, but we shall think them a longer way off still when we get above them and look down on them with a kind of gracious contempt of their twinkling and quivering lamps. Hope on! There is a word in the wintry air, a song in the wintry night—"Until!"

Paul's idea of "until" was a coming to the measure of the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. Perfect does not mean what it is often supposed to mean and what people get up more or less futile and senseless meetings for the purpose of promoting. There are no perfect men in that narrow sense. There is probably no sin greater in its possible implications than sinlessness as it is narrowly and imperfectly understood. Not until resurrection has done for the body what regeneration has done for the soul shall we know the meaning of "perfect" in its moral and spiritual sense. Meanwhile, it may signify the culmination of a new period, the advancement, chapter after chapter, of a new book, promotion after promotion to school after school in the higher academies of creation; it may mean as much as can be done here and now, but not perfection except as the end is the beginning of another period. The Bible ends, Revelation can only begin. Sometimes we have heard our dear little children say that they have finished school. We know the sense in which those dear little hearts use the word school. We can never get beyond the school of God, but we may go from class to class, from grade to grade, and on the conclusion of each grade, we may say,

So much is perfect; that is done, but it is only done as a pedestal is done on which the statue is to stand, or is only perfect in the sense in which a field has been sowed with good seed which will come up thirty, sixty, a hundredfold. And so, as experience is multiplied by experience, and as consciousness is added to consciousness, we may seem at each particular crisis to be so far perfect. But the perfection is away beyond the sanctuary of the sun, away in the city which has no temple, because the whole city itself is but a temple: no paradox in words. We must die to see it, and we shall see no temple because the whole heaven is one vast radiant house of God. Brothers, let us cheer ourselves with this "till" and "until." Do not let us rush at hasty judgments; let us practise a religion of repose, let us exemplify the piety of rest. And when people ask us the vain question when will we reach the last perfection, we shall say, The hour is hidden with God, but the promise is that we are to wait until Shiloh come.

WORDS FOR PREACHERS.

A wicked priest is the worst creature upon God's earth ; no sin is so black as that shall appear from under a white surplice. Every man's iniquity is so much the heinouser as his place is the holier. The sin of the clergy is like a rheum, which rising from the stomach into the head, drops down upon the lungs, fretting the most noble and vital parts, till all the members languish into corruption. The lewd sons of Eli were so much the less tolerable by sinning in the tabernacle. Their sacrifices might do away the sins of others ; no sacrifice could do away their own. Many a soul was the cleaner for the blood of those beasts they shed ; their own souls were the fouler by it. By one and the same service they did expiate the people's offences and multiply their own. Our clergy is no charter for heaven. Such men are like the conveyances of land, evidences and instruments to settle others in the kingdom of heaven, while themselves have no part of that they convey. It is no impossible thing for men at once to show the way to heaven with their tongue, and lead the way to hell with their foot.—*Adams*, 1654.

As shell-fishes which breed pearls for others to wear, but are sick of them themselves ; as a Mercury statue, which shows the way to others, but stands still itself ; or as a whetstone, which sharpens the knife, but is blunt itself : thus many men, like Plutarch's Lamiae, have eyes for abroad, but are blind at home, are wise for others, but not for themselves. " If thou be wise," saith Solomon, " be wise for thyself." It is not enough for a man to do good to others, though he could to all, if he remain an enemy to himself : he must be like a cinnamon tree, which lets not out all its sap into leaves and fruit which will fall off, but keeps the principal part of its fragrancy for the bark which stays on ; like a tree planted by the water side, which, though it let out much sap to the remoter boughs, yet is specially careful of the root that it be not left dry. And to speak truth, what profit would it be to a man, if he could heal and help all the sick men in the world, and be incurably sick himself ? If he could get all the men on the earth, all the angels in heaven to be his friends, and have God still for his enemy ? If he could save others, and then lose his own soul ; to be like the ship (Acts xxvii.) broken to pieces itself, though it helped others to the shore ? Or like those that built the ark for Noah, and were drowned themselves : this is to have the cares of Martha upon him on the behalf of others, and never mind that one thing of Mary, the care of his own salvation.—*Purchas*, 1577-1628.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee for all special mornings and tender memories and morning stars that bring with them the dew of new ideas and new encouragements. We bless Thee that Thou hast broken up the currents of history and given each a peculiar significance. Thou hast made many beginnings and many endings, and endings that are themselves beginnings ; we pray that we may have understanding of the times and interpret the periods as Thou dost mean them to be interpreted. May there be no foolish men who let the signs of the times and of the glowing heavens pass by unread and unheeded : may we have understanding of the times, may we hear the beating of the pulse, may we know the coming of God and of His invisible kingdom ; and thus may we be succoured and strengthened and mightily upheld in all the coming and going ages of time. We bless Thee for anything that brings to our heart's memory the birth of Thy Son ; may He be born in our hearts the hope of glory, may each heart be a Bethlehem, may the Son of God be the child of every man, and the Son of God be the Saviour of every one ; and thus shall we hold fellowship with the past and with the future, and shall realise the security and the blessedness of a complete citizenship. We thank Thee for whatever brings human hearts together in loving interest, in reciprocal solicitude, so that we may take interest one in another, and may extend help and loving sympathy one to another when the valley is very dark and when the mountain is very steep ; to this end we bless Thee for Thine own house upon the earth ; the tabernacle of God is with men ; our little houses lean their walls against the rock of Thy sanctuary. May we never live outside Thy temple ; may Thy sanctuary be in our thoughts night and day ; may we love Thy Zion, and steadily and faithfully work for the interests of Thy kingdom. We give Thee thanks for all the blessings of the year ; by-and-bye we may give Thee thanks for all its withering sorrows ; meanwhile, we think of the brightness and the sun and the gladness, and bathe ourselves in the joy of those who have greater joy than we ourselves can realise. Hence we bless Thee for all young-heartedness, for all true festival of love, for all the delights of those who have met kindred souls on the pilgrim way and have united themselves one with the other to complete the journey to the skies. We thank Thee for all who have prospered in business

and have remembered the Lord in the high noon of their success. We pray for those who have been desolated and sorely stricken and utterly bereaved, and have been made to drink the bitterness of Thy waters ; enable such to remember that Thou didst open all the fountains, whether bitter or sweet, and that Thy purpose has not yet come to the morning dawn. Enable us, therefore, to sustain ourselves in holy promises and prophecies, and to rest quietly whilst others can sing loudly and sweetly. We remember now many who are desolated by reason of the ravages of war ; we think of lonely homes, of widows and orphans and childless parents, and we commend the whole case to Thee, Thou God of battles and Thou God of love. Many questions are too high for us, much knowledge lies beyond the reach of our feeble minds ; but we can pray for faith to leave all in the hands of God, and for patience to wait the unfolding of Thy will. We thank Thee for all Thy love, we trust Thee in all Thy providences, we say, Clouds and darkness are round about Thee, but righteousness and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne ; in these great sanctuaries, hidden in the eternal rock, we abide and wait, not knowing God, but knowing His Son Jesus Christ, who is able by the power of the Holy Spirit to reveal Him unto hearts that wait for His coming.

We tarry for a moment at Bethlehem. We tarry for ever on Calvary. Amen.

LVIII.

TILL AND UNTIL.

II.

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 24TH, 1899.



LET us continue as far as possible the discourse which we began on Thursday, studying the "Till" and the "Until" of prophecy and providence and soul-sustaining promise. We swept over considerable space on Thursday ; there remains some ground yet to be traversed. The till and the until of time, the point that seems to go beyond time, to

anticipate ages that are hardly yet reckonable within the four corners of the calendar of time. We could not live without the till and the until of the Divine book. Sometimes the period is far off; sometimes it is to-morrow; yet we could not live without it, though it be ages away beyond the arithmetic of counted centuries. Nor could we live without that event which is going to take place in the to-morrow of imagination. "Day" seems to mean, if strictly limited to itself, despair, then suicide—the last of the sacraments and the best; then we see a light just on the mountain top; it may be but a candle-gleam, but it is a gleam; meanwhile, all light is poetry and liberty and strength. When naturalists have written all they have to write about the great mystery and action of light, they have only written a preface to a course of sermons. There are moral uses of light, poetries of light, paradises in every star-ray and in every blink of the sun.

Let us add to our list of untills. Ezekiel has a grand until or till—the words are the same in meaning. In Ezekiel xxi. 27 we read, "Until He come whose right it is"—to save, to reign, to direct, to take the whole ribbons into His own hands and drive the chariot of the universe as He pleases. What a word of cheer, encouragement, and most blessed and inspiring assurance! There is always One coming "whose right it is." He does not come in an apologetic attitude with a compromise from some threatened power, with a proposition that this and that should be divided between light and darkness; He comes with right. Nothing is settled until it is settled right. Do not believe that hush is peace; do not believe in any peace that is not built on righteousness. Understand, however, the largeness of that word righteousness; it is not my right, your right, the right of some third or unknown party, a selfish and limited right; it is a righteousness that involves the very nature and essence of the Deity. What is a crooked plumb line? Nothing, worse than nothing. What if we trifle with the joint of the square and give it a little tip to a hardly measurable angle? Will it still be a square? No. You killed the square when you changed the angle. Geometry is sensitive; mathe-

matics will not bear to be affronted; mathematics will have an avenging visitation upon those who trifle with rectitude. The arithmeticians say that figures, poor plain figures, have affections. Who could have thought that an arithmetician could have dreamed so deeply? He looks as if he himself were but a superfluities, and sometimes he gets into such ecstasies as to speak about the passion of numbers and the affections of numbers; then he becomes religious, and builds what small altar he can with his brickdust. On what do the ages feed? On the promise that One is coming who will bring right with Him, and who will reign because He is right; who will sit upon a throne that cannot be torn down, because it fits into the whole scheme of things and is the part and the coronation of processes immeasurable and inconceivable. This will get rid of many paltry, petty, and insufficient teachers of compromise and balancing and settled covenantings and perfidious double commissions, taking alike from the buyer and the seller, and considering that all is going well because nobody knows anything about it. Nothing goes well that is in itself wrong. There is a tumbling day, a day of upset and ruin. "Be sure your sin will find you out!" thunders through the universe, and no man can cough it down. If we could get rid of the notion that we have to handle and to settle things we should be greatly strengthened and greatly relieved. There is next to nothing that we have to handle. Some people can scarcely handle their own raiment; some persons need trainbearers to carry their poor skirts; and men are soon bereaved, stripped, and depleted of every high ambition and crafty cunning policy, and are left on the roadside with coronets that never ruled and with ambitions that were but decorated abortions. Those who live by faith live in peace; they are perfectly sure that all things work together for good to them that love God; and nobody loves God who does not love the right, who does not love righteousness, and who takes a little, narrow, parochial, selfish view of things. We are so soon overdone; we write fables and draw pictures about a man who tried to carry a globe on his shoulders. Why, it is but a poor bean, nay, it is but a poorer pea which he carries, and not at all worth mentioning in any catalogue of

the stars. We are tempted to think that nearness is bigness, and we forget that there is One coming, coming with the clouds, coming with the morning, coming after the shortest day has had its little dark reign; coming, and coming to remain by force of right. I wish men would not tinker with things; that they would simply know their limitations; that they would go into the sanctuary of God, and sit there; and if they cannot speak they can be silent, and if they cannot sing they can speak, and if they can neither sing nor speak they can have wrought in them by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost the miracle of patience. Is it nothing to have had all these men about us who have said "till," "until"—the men of eyes who have seen the far-off light and interpreted it to those of us who dwell in the shaded valley?

There are wondrous instances of "till" and "until" in the New Testament. For example, in Matthew ii. 13, "until I bring thee word." That is a new scheme of lodgment. How long have I to remain here? and the angel says, Until I come back. I want to be moving. Sit still! I do not see why I cannot proceed further. Wait until I bring thee word in thy little business, thy little household environment, thy limited village or limited circumstances; lodge there until I bring thee word: I will not forget thee: God knows the address, He never forgets an address, He never mixes in indiscriminate confusion the dwellings of those who love Him with the dwellings of those who despise Him: wait until! Thank God for that "until"! It is itself a limitation. Whilst it appears to be the indication of a great space or a great time, it fixes a point of return, of deliverance, of liberty, of light. Oh, it is so long! So it is; but the length of the waiting is part of the education of the soul. When shall I see him, see her, again? could I not see for one little golden hour in the week? I ask no more. And the angel said, Remain until I bring thee word; I watch all the dressing and preparation and equipment; I know when spirit should meet spirit, when alliances should be completed or renewed; when the veil should be blown to pieces or withdrawn like a curtain of film; I understand the counsel of God in this matter; stop until—until—until.

The apostles were not men much given to a very high order of patience. Like ourselves, they always wanted to be doing something. Some men cannot be really happy unless they are doing a little; it may be only opening and shutting an umbrella, but they must be at it, you cannot keep their hands off it. Well, they were made so, and God will read such riddles to us when we have nothing better to do than to listen to their reading. The apostles were men of this sort: Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom unto Israel? Wait; it is not for you to know the times and the seasons. What shall we do when we are bereaved of our Lord? Tarry in Jerusalem. How long? Until ye be endued with power from on high. What are we to do in the meantime? Do nothing. We think we can be doing something. You think wrongly. Do not do anything in your own strength, because you will only live to apologise for having done it. Do not imagine that you see anything as it really is; the secret of the centuries is with God. Tarry ye in Jerusalem until you get the power. There is no mistaking power. The difference between one man and another often is that one man can do it, and another man cannot do it; and the great mischief is that the man who cannot do it is tempted of the devil to believe that he could do it as well as the other man. We have to wait until there is a great flood-tide of power, a conscious access or accession of strength; when that mighty power comes upon us, then we may go forth and do the Lord's will. Waiting is education. We are taking in elements of strength when we hardly know that we are doing so. But one clear day at the seaside when the wind is coming over the sea sometimes makes an old man young again. What has he been doing? Nothing; and doing everything by doing that nothing: putting himself into right relation, waiting for proper opportunities, lying sweetly, softly, dreamily in the arms of God, the Father-Mother; next day he enters upon a renewed inheritance of energy; all the time the kindly wind was breathing into him new power and displacing old weakness. Tarry ye until you are conscious of power, not of power only, but of power from on high; that is, not only a certain degree of power, but a certain quality of strength; then go forth, and no man shall

be able to stand against the hosts of the Lord. Oh! this neglect of the Spirit, this disregard of the Fountain of energy, this broken and hesitating companionship with the angel powers of the universe, who are waiting to nourish us and cherish us and nurse us out of our infirmity into God's own true strength. We think we are making progress when we are only going round and round a circle. You cannot teach the right idea of progress to some persons. A man does not go across the Atlantic by walking round and round the mainmast; that is not the action which is progress; there is an action that has no forwardness in it. God Himself takes us through the right exercises and keeps us on the right line. But we cannot wait for the power. We think we have the power, and therein we become weak as other men. Where the power is really given there is no mistake about its quality. You cannot explain it; all power is a mystery, except the merely mechanical power; but the dynamic power, the inside, or what we may term the almost spiritual power, who can understand or interpret? Yet there is no mistaking its effects; its energy is indescribable, but patent and indisputable. The Church will not wait for power; the Church wants to mechanise its own strength, to get up its own new little programme of progress: and the Lord Himself watches such poor little paper kingdoms take fire, go up into smoke, and fall back into dust. The Church of Christ to-day and every day ought to be the mightiest force in the world. It has all the elements, all the promises; it has not the faith. It proposes and compromises and begs pardon of the devil and hopes he is not unduly inconvenienced. What becomes of such a church? Wreck, ruin, oblivion, or contempt.

The Apostle frequently uses the word "till" and "until"; notably in 1 Corinthians xi. 26, "shew the Lord's death till He come." There are so many double sentences in Holy Scripture, and so many people have never noticed them. They are too busy with their Christmas beef to read the word of the living God. These Biblical double sentences are great jewels, and we are not forbidden to decorate with such ornaments. Hear David, the greatest master of plaintive poetry that the world ever knew; saith he;

“I shall go to him, he shall not return to me.” There is the double action. I always want to reverse that sentence that I may feel more acutely the tenderness of its meaning: He shall not return to me, but I will go to him. The assurance that I will go to him makes him live in the very grave; I am moving in a curve unknown to geometry, we shall come face to face in the by-and-bye. So when Paul tells me about my Lord’s death he hardly gets the word out of his mouth until he says, “till He come.” That is the true rhetoric, the divine eloquence, the substantial and indestructible logic. We do indeed shew forth a death, but we only show it forth until it be turned into life, until it be forgotten and the grave is destined to be forgotten, and one day the new earth may not remember that ever a grave was cut in the old earth. If in that day we should ask for reminiscences of the grave, the new earth will be stupefied by our very inquiry, it will not know what language we are speaking. Death, grave, loss, pain—is there any interpreter who will tell me, poor old earth, what these words mean? And lo, there shall be no interpreter. The language was only invented that it might be forgotten.

I notice that the Christian pulpit has suffered a severe loss within the last few days by the withdrawal from these grey scenes of time of Dwight Lyman Moody, known to all the Christian Church as a devoted, faithful, and successful evangelist. Mr. Moody was a strong, capable man. Like a wise man, he knew his limitations, and he worked within them; he never wanted to be somebody else, it was enough that he knew his talent, whether one or two or five, and with whole-heartedness he gave himself to the highest of all work. There was a time when I was slightly disinclined to have much commerce or communion with Mr. Moody, because I feared he was a man with only one set of sympathies. When I met him in his own house in America that feeling was instantaneously and completely dissipated; I found he was a big man, a man of wide views and wide sympathies, and that he only needed more light, or

the opportunity of enjoying more light, in order thoroughly to enter into his privileges. He was pre-eminently, within his own limits, a preacher. Do not be misled by the word preacher, because it admits of several definitions, or, perhaps, many definitions have been unduly thrust upon it. I could not imagine Mr. Moody taking out of his satchel or pocket an elaborate essay which he was going to read to a stupefied and bewildered audience. He spoke right out of his heart, and grammar had sometimes to take care of itself, and logic had sometimes to get out of the way. But it was the Gospel Mr. Moody preached, a living, comprehensive, divine, everlasting Gospel. What is that Gospel but a great welcome to the human heart to come to the living Christ and receive the assurances of pardon and growth and happiest destiny?

Having a little feeling of hesitation as to whether he and I lived under the same firmament so far as theological views were concerned, I did not hasten to his house. Feeling that I was loitering by the way, he came to fetch me; that was extremely and beautifully Moody-like. He had a good deal of the disciplinarian and even of the soldier in his constitution. So he came to the hotel, about a mile away from his house, and said I must come at once. We all went with him. It was a simple, homely, comfortable, farm-like home on the hillside, a room on the right hand and a room on the left, and both the rooms and the passage included some of us could put into one of our London houses. Mr. Moody beckoned me into a little room which he called his study, and taking two books out of his shelves he said, "Look at these." I looked at them. "Open them," he said. I opened them, and I found marks, notes, special indications of careful perusal; little sentences were marked that I should have thought Mr. Moody would have never noticed. And then said he to me, putting back these two volumes of "The People's Bible" into his shelves, "I never travel without these, and these books have done more for me than any other books of the kind I ever read." After that I could not suspect him of any tendency towards narrowness or exclusiveness, because I know that in "The

People's Bible" there is room for everybody who is earnest in spirit and lovingly waiting for the consolation of Israel.

From that moment I knew more of the man. I examined some of his work. I was taken down to his great school, almost a university in outline. When I considered what he had been doing along those lines I could not there and then, one sunny Saturday afternoon in Connecticut, but thank God for the man and his service. He brought some thirty or forty of his girls to sing to us at his front door, and when they were singing "We shall know each other better when the mists have rolled away," the tune sort of limped, and he said, "Girls! sing up, or Dr. Parker will think you are frightened of him." Then they all sang like so many birds, and it was a scene my wife and myself never could forget.

A few days ago we heard that Mr. Moody was dead; I remembered that sunny afternoon, I remembered that he alone of that little company was not the only one who was dead, in the little human sense of the term. My wife was fond of his ministry, nor was she the less fond of some of his, shall we say, less conventional ways of doing things. Not knowing who she was, at one great London meeting he seized her by the arm and said, "Are you for Christ?" And she was once at a great Salvation Army meeting, and something of the same kind occurred. A sweet little Salvationist came and said to her, "Are you saved?" and she said, "No, but I am being saved"—the true grammar and the true theology. May God raise up many men like Mr. Moody, strong, simple, unselfish men, who will teach us how to make the best of our time, and to be ready when the Lord comes!

PRAYER.

ALmighty God, we thank Thee for the good news of the world, we bless Thee that there is now a gospel in the air, a great voice of love, a great cry of welcome from the heart of heaven. We bless Thee for the mysteries of the great Redemption; we cannot penetrate them, but we can feel their holy awe and their inspiring energy. We live in mystery; for we live and move and have our being in God. Teach us, we humbly pray Thee, the limits of our understanding; may we know where to stop, how to listen, and how to pray. Teach us that secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children, that we may do all the words of the holy law. We bless Thee for a song in the night season, for a sudden gleam of light that pierces and disperses the darkness; may we often see that beam of light in our own spiritual experience, lest we sink in dejection and die in despair. It hath pleased Thee to create a great ministry of darkness; Thou dost come unto Thy servants in a thick cloud, Thou dost take them away into a mountain apart where there is no noise, where no tumult is known, and there in the holy loneliness Thou dost communicate Thy law and whisper of Thy coming kingdom of redemption by blood and enthronement by right of love. We thank Thee for all holy memories, we bless Thee for historical days, and count them amongst our jewels; we often recount them, we obey the inspiration of reminiscence, and go back over long-gone yesterdays and centuries that we may thus fortify ourselves for present stress and pain by a review of Thy wondrous providence. We cannot fail if we pray. Didst Thou not say in the oldest of the times, Thou shalt remember? and did not Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Saviour and Priest, say, Remember? and did He not give us a cup and say, Remember me? We bless Thee for the faculty of memory; may we go back upon all the centuries which Thy great judgment has set up in awe, and the glorious centuries which Thou hast set forth in light. Coming back from these holy sanctuaries, we shall be strong and full of hope and tender-hearted, because of overflowing gratitude. This Christmastide we would remember. Lord, help us to exercise our spiritual memory. Amen.

LIX.

PERSONALITY.

PREACHED ON CHRISTMAS MORNING, 1899.

"And it was noised that He was in the house."—MARK ii. 1.



O matter who else was there; if Jesus Christ Himself was not there the house was of no consequence. There may have been fifty people in the house, but if He was not there the whole fifty could not make up for His absence. It was always noised, reported, published when Jesus Christ was in the house. Everybody seemed to know it as if by intuition or instinct; there was a balminess in the air, and a strange weird kind of feeling in the very wind. If you had asked people to explain this in words they might have felt some difficulty in doing so. So it is with us; we know a great many things without being able to tell why or to explain how, or to reduce the gracious and inspiring intelligence to language. If the one person is not there, what does it matter who else may be there? It is always one person that unites and accentuates all other persons, and turns the multitude into an aggregate friendship; but without that one person, explanatory, luminous, all-uniting, what is the multitude but a mob? It is one person that creates the house, that creates our interest in certain affairs, private, social, public; there is always one life we wish to please, there is always one peculiar and special approbation we wish to realise; the praise of such a one is worth a whole theatre of others. This principle, which we all know in daily practical life, was peculiarly realised in the case of Jesus Christ. He went to be guest, but He soon became host; He went to receive, but He soon realised Himself in His character, meant to be such from all eternity, and became the giver. It was noised that He was in

the house, and thenceforth that house, however small, obscure, humble, became the central point of the town or the village or the universe.

How wondrously strange it is, this whole mystery and action of personality ! You had a great number there ? Yes, but — What made the town so fair ? what turned the whole mob into a company of apostles and friends ? what made the world tolerable, bearable ? what saved it from being an inconceivably painful tragedy ? And you mustered in great thousands to see the great hero leave his native shores ; did you ? Yes, we did. You do not seem to be very gratified or pleased about it ? No, we are neither gratified nor pleased. Oh, tell me why ! there were fifty thousand people there ; that was enough ? No ; the hero did not come ; he changed his plan, he went by another route. But were you not satisfied to behold fifty thousand people ? No. You understand that ? Perfectly. That is exactly what happened in the case of Jesus Christ. No matter who was there, or who was not there ; if He Himself was not present the whole occasion lost its genius, its accent, and its poetry. It is one man that brings the fifty thousand together. I wonder if I could make this quite clear to the youngest and slowest of my hearers. There was a wonderful man who played wonderfully upon a wonderful instrument ; they say he sometimes played upon one string only ; and a Welshman told a friend of mine that he went to hear him. The Welshman himself was a player upon the violin, and said he, “ We were all jealous and envious of this long greasy-haired Italian, and we said, ‘ What can Paganini do more than we can do ? ’ and there he stood before us, and we said, ‘ That is Paganini, what can he do more than we can do ? ’ But he lifted up his bow and brought it down, and, my word, sir ! it was like a shower of music from heaven, sir ! ” He cut off all their heads, poured them all into a common basket, and gave the basket to anybody that would take it. I want thus to illustrate even to the youngest what is meant by personality—the one soul that creates an interest in other souls. That was peculiarly the case with our Lord Jesus Christ. He it is that unites the universe, and makes

the universe worth keeping up ; otherwise, it would exhaust itself and go away in fire and cloud and a horrible noise. Read what the apostle Paul says in his great epistles to the Colossians and to the Ephesians, wherein he represents Jesus Christ as being before all things and above all things, and the explanation and glory and crown of all things ; as if to remove Him were to shatter the universe, which He used as a garment in which He might go forth more or less visibly to itself. We will never get rid of personality. There is a section, whether great or small I heed not, of people who would like to get rid of what they call individuality. You cannot get rid of it ; it is written and unwritten, it is a decree from the beginning ; it would suit them to get rid of individuality because they might in some cases get rid of responsibility, and then there is always some little streak of comedy lying in the very middle of a tragedy. When they got rid of individuality they would be as good as anybody else. Blessed be God, there are some things which even the meanest insects cannot do, and to get rid of individuality would be to impoverish and enfeeble the world. To-day we gather around the greatest Individuality ever known, the Personality that explains all other life, and that brings with it a promise, a discipline, a blessing, and a destiny.

It was noised that He was in the house. This Christmas morning we may say, It was noised that He was in the world. Never forget that there was a great noise made about this birth. One angel began it, and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, singing and shouting and praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest ! and all heaven throbbed and quivered under that triumphant anthem. Jesus Christ, then, did not come noiselessly into the world ; so far as He Himself was concerned, there was little or no noise, but the moment it was hinted that He was in the world-house, the earth, a visible manifestation of the invisible Deity, there was noise enough, musical noise, a great multitudinous acclaim. There are some times when people cannot be silent ; indeed, there are some times when silence would be a species of

blasphemy. Jesus Christ Himself said, If these little ones were to hold their tongues, the very stones would cry out. Enthusiasm has its day, its place, its elevating and inspiring influence. Never have much social commerce with indifferent people, with people who can turn away from a great piece of music and ask how you are. As if it mattered how you are or how anybody else is amid the entrancement and the passion and the transport of a wondrous revelation. They say there are people who after the greatest possible religious service can tell you what the weather was last Wednesday. Ah me ! it is so hard to live. They are not caught in the whirlwind of the great cry and welcome and gospel of the heart of God. I suppose such people must live, or the market-place would come to bankruptcy.

It was noised that He was in the world to bring you good tidings of great joy ; for unto you is born this day in the house of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And all heaven was not orchestra enough to announce the infinite blessing. Have we ever been caught in that passion ? or are we only those cold-blooded folks who have to be carried in the ship as ballast ?

It was noised, not only that He was in the world, but presently that He was the foremost Man in the world. In a sense the only man, because without Him there could be no life. People began to say concerning Jesus, "Never man spake like this man." He became the pronoun that stood for the only noun there is, the Deity. And on another occasion the people said, "It was never so seen in Israel." That is personality, that is something characteristic and divine and highly accentuated. The people knew what they were talking about ; the history of Israel was the only history with which they were really familiar, and they said, looking upon the works of Jesus and listening to His words, "It was never so seen in Israel." And thus little by little He stands apart in a dignified, majestic, divine isolation. It was not that Jesus Christ spake, but that He so spake that no other man ever spoke like Him. When Nicodemus came to Him, he did not say, Rabbi—or Teacher—

Thou doest miracles. That would have been a poor speech; the tribute was in the descriptive word which the master in Israel used: "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher sent from God; for no man can do"—miracles? no, but—"these miracles that Thou doest"; this peculiar kind of miracle, this miracle *sui generis*—"except God be with him": it takes the Godhead to create flowers like these. Thus it was the individuality or personality of the man. Nor did the people care so much about the miracles when they came to their own better understanding; they idealised the miracles, they lifted them up to the level of their proper significance, and they said in effect, These are not miracles only, they are blessings. No man can work a miracle, blessing, except God be with him. Conjurers enough, sleight-of-hand has outrun all the words, and now puzzles the infancy of the generations and makes a livelihood out of the puzzling; but there are no blessings in these necromancies and conjurings. When Jesus Christ did a miracle it was never to show the power, it was always to confer the blessing. That separates Him from all the miracle-mongers and Egyptian astrologers and ancient necromancers: He chose to do or to confer His blessings in that peculiar and striking form.

It was noised that He was in the house, and the world; that He was not only in the house-world or world-house, but that He stood alone in it and gradually drew away from all other men that He might ascend the throne which He created. But in a sweet domestic sense it is often noised that He is in the family circle, in the little house, in our house where the cradle is, and where the little school-books are scattered about, and where the aged folks are that are now wondering what there is just across the river. It is noised that Jesus is in this house or that house; the one may be a little thatched cottage, the other a great mansion, almost a palace, with great grounds around it; and Jesus can be equally in both. How so? How so?—as the sunshine is; the sunshine visits the little thatch-roofed cot, and the sunshine pronounces its silent blessing on the proudest roofs of the proudest people.

Is it noised that Jesus Christ is in our house? What do they say? They say, knowing our family life, that Jesus is in that house because of its order, its temper, its resignation, its whole method and economy of existence; they say that only the presence of Jesus Christ in that house could have made such a death. There never was a deathbed scene like it except under the same circumstances, the same deep consciousness of the same majestic and tender Personality. They say that Jesus was so visible in that house to the heart of faith and to the heart of love that the people could not sing but sob a hymn over the dear departed. They say that the joys were greater than the sorrow. Who did it? Take that wine to the master of the feast and say, Who made this wine? and you will be told that never such wine was tasted before, that there has been a great miracle wrought. These are the proofs and illustrations of the presence of Christ, in the heart and in the house, and no amount of argument, contention, can get rid of those solemn, profound, inspiring experiences which enable the bereaved to cry, O Death! where is thy sting? O Grave! thy victory? produce it! We smite thee on the face, and defy thy cruelty.

One day it will be noised that He is on the throne. It was noised that He was in the house, it was noised that He was in the world, it was noised that He was the chief speaker and the chief miracle-worker of the world, and it shall one day be noised with the voice of thunders and tempests and great whirlwinds that He is on the throne. Tempest shall tell it to tempest, and ocean to ocean, and world to world, and planet to planet; and there shall go forth a great, grand, solemn cry, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. And they shall cry in every tongue, Hallelujah! and Bethlehem shall culminate in Heaven.

WORDS FOR PREACHERS.

Husbandmen, when they are disappointed of their expected harvest, have not any to recompense their loss, but all is gone; both seed and labour; but notwithstanding the labour of the minister doth not profit with men, in respect of their incredulity, yet hath he his reward in heaven.—*Cawdray*, 1609.

A graceless, inexperienced preacher is one of the most unhappy creatures upon earth: and yet he is ordinarily very insensible of his unhappiness; for he has so many counterfeits that seem like the gold of saving grace, and so many splendid stones that resemble Christian's jewels, that he is seldom troubled with the thoughts of his poverty, but thinks that he is "rich, and increased in goods, and hath need of nothing," when he is "poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked."—*Baxter*, 1615-1691.

And he that sits at home may study geography, and draw most exact descriptions of countries, and yet never see them nor travel towards them; so you may describe to others the joys of heaven, and yet never come near it in your own hearts: as a man may tell others of the sweetness of meat which he never tasted; or as a blind man, by learning, may dispute of light and of colours, so may you study and preach most heavenly matter, which yet never sweetened your own spirits, and set forth to others that heavenly light, wherewith your own souls were never enlightened, and bring that fire for the use of your people that never once warmed your own hearts. If you should study of nothing but heaven while you lived, and preach of nothing but heaven to your people, yet might your own hearts be strangers to it. What heavenly passages had Balaam in his prophecies, yet little of it (it is likely) in his spirit. Nay, we are under a more subtle temptation than any other men, to draw us from this heavenly life. If our employments did lie at a great distance from heaven, and did take up our thoughts upon worldly things, we should not be so apt to be so contented and deluded; but, when we find ourselves employed upon nothing else, we are easier drawn to take up here. Studying and preaching of heaven is liker to a heavenly life than thinking and talking of the world is, and the likeness is it that is like to deceive us. This is to die the most miserable death, even to famish ourselves because we have bread on our tables, which is worse than to famish when we cannot get it; and to die for thirst while we draw water for others, thinking it enough that we have daily to do with it, though we never drink it to our souls' refreshing.—*Baxter*, 1615-1691.

PRAYER.

ALmighty GOD, our Father, we bless Thee for the ministry of reconciliation. It is a ministry of Thine own ; by Jesus Christ, in whose name we approach Thee, we have received the atonement ; we are now by Thy grace and by such faith as Thou hast enabled us to exercise, no longer twain, but are in very deed one with God. There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. He is our Daysman, He is able to lay His hand upon both and to make reconciliation. By none other have we received the atonement. We gather in the name of Christ, in the name of Christ we pray, in the name of Christ we hope. Thou hast brought us to our last weekday service in another year ; all things seem to have upon them the image and aspect of death. This is a dying time ; we think of it as a sleeping hour : the earth is at rest ; behold, there will presently come upon the face of the land we live in a great vision of light and a great sense of warmth, and the flowers will come back, and we shall forget they have ever been away. We thank Thee for all seasonable suggestion, for a gospel of the year, for a gospel of the day, for a sweet, tender music that belongs to the special morning, whether it be a morning in winter or a morning in the glowing summer. Thou hast a word for every hour, for every soul, for every occasion. We come to Thee, therefore, in this the closing time of another year, and we feel tenderly, gratefully, yet profoundly solemn. The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away the year. We cannot get it back to remedy its wrongs, to obliterate its false records. God pity us, seeing that we pray, in all these glooms, in the name of Jesus Christ, in whom there is no darkness at all. Amen.

LX.

RECONCILIATION AFTER CON- VERSION.

PREACHED ON THURSDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 28TH, 1899.

"Reconciling the world unto Himself. . . . Be ye reconciled to God."

—2 CORINTHIANS V. 19, 20.



HIS paragraph is full of the word and of the idea reconcile or reconciliation. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself"; He has given unto us the word or the ministry of reconciliation; He has given us our instructions, written us our gospel, expressed it in words we cannot fail to remember: knowing "that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." And more than that: He "hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation," as if it were a continual word, a living word, a word that belongs to the very air we breathe; it is a ministry, a stewardship, a charge, a responsibility; so that the ministry has never to ask, What have I to do? the ministry has to do a certain thing, profound, far-reaching, much-including; the ministry has to declare and preach and expound and enforce the word of reconciliation. If you ask us who we are and what we are, I will tell you: "Now then," after all this, "we are ambassadors, ambassadors for Christ." It is as if "God did beseech you by us and through us: be you reconciled unto God": be at one with God, be at peace with God; let there be no war or discontent, let there be no evil reproach or upbraiding, but a complete, solid, continual oneness with the Eternal Spirit. That is grand. There is something then for the ministry of Christ to do, something definite, something beneficent, something positive, and in its way something final; this, however, being one of the finals

in which we shall find new beginnings, germs, and starting-points of new and undreamed growths and advances.

There are two reconciliations, if I may so put it, and I shall not be deterred by pedantry from so declaring my gospel. There is a reconciliation before conversion, necessary to conversion, and in itself a species of complete conversion; there is another reconciliation, which seems to me oftentimes to be harder, deeper, as it were more exacting; a never-ceasing reconciliation; a reconciliation of growth, progress, advancement, perfectness. We have all, it is but reasonable to suppose, passed the first conversion or the first reconciliation; we carry no arms against God, no gun, or sabre or sword or cruel spear; we do not dare the Almighty to battle. I hear as it were the clash of falling arms, which, being interpreted, means, We fight no longer against our God; we say to Christ, Galilean, Thou hast conquered. We do not declare war against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, Let us cast their bands from us. We are no more scoundrels, ruffians. We may have passed into a still more dangerous state, and it is that second reconciliation which unmans and overpowers me. Have we received the second reconciliation? Some Christians do not hesitate about talking concerning the second blessing. It is a richly evangelical term; we have no need to be ashamed of it or to apologise for it. I will venture to ask, Have we received the second reconciliation? are we far away from the gate of Damascus, where our wrath was hot against the Lord and against His Christ? and have we passed into serener conditions, into a nobler and ampler, a saintlier and tenderer manhood? "Be ye reconciled to God." I am not addressing a gang of opponents of the Lord; I will not treat my audience as if they had gathered themselves together for the purpose of opposing the Most High; they have done nothing of the kind. And yet I may venture, first to address myself, and then through myself to address them in some such terms and tones as these: We have passed from open, bitter hostility against the Lord and against His throne, but are we yet fully reconciled to God? I

am not ; I sometimes am ; like yourselves, I have mountain moments, times when I can see afar, when rivers are threadlets in the sand ; stormy seas are not to be heard in such sacred altitudes : but there is a coming down again, times of peevishness and unrest and self-regard and almost self-idolatry ; an atheism within a theism, an atheism within the sanctuary ; the sanctuary without them, but a secret hard coldness or distrust, and sometimes an active suspicion against things, against the shaping and the managing of things, as if I could do it better. I have received the first reconciliation, as you have ; let us together unite in thanking God that we are not as we once were ; we are washed, we are cleansed, we have passed the gate of the first catharism, and now we sing Christian hymns and psalms and spiritual songs, and call ourselves a congregation of believers. And yet it is possible to be this honestly and joyously, and to have moments in which we feel that it might have been otherwise, and sweeter and better, and the hymn is sung to notes, but not to music ; we have the form, we may not have the power of unity with God, an acquiescence in His holy will. You see partly now what I mean by the second reconciliation, which is impossible without the first, but which ought to flow from the first as a matter of natural sequence, and indeed is so flowing ; and God who inhabiteth eternity is patient with us in all the repairing and rectification and critical attention and self-distrust and self-laceration which must follow as indeed a happy sign of growth in the divine life.

We are reconciled to God in the matter of sin, through our Lord Jesus Christ, but are we reconciled to God in the matter of providence ? Do we think it enough to cast off the old nature as to sin in its common or usual acceptation, and do we follow the soul back and back and back, until we get at the nearest point to spirituality, and say, You are right in the main, you are right in the mass so-called, but are you quite at one with God in the order of His daily providences ? There is self-examination there. No man must lecture another upon that topic ; the preacher must be severer with himself than with any of his hearers. I am reconciled as to what is customarily called sin ; I pray, I pray in the

name of Jesus Christ our Lord, I pray at the Cross, I love to dwell on the great mystery of the great Saviour : but am I reconciled to God in the way in which He is managing my life? could I not have done better? could I not have ordered things more proportionately and satisfactorily in the great world? could I not have snubbed the wicked with a sharper reproach, and could I not have lifted up the righteous to a more visible altitude of eminence and acceptance with God? and would I have allowed that little cradle to be emptied? could I have allowed some invisible hand to pluck the child from the mother's breast and almost laugh in the mother's face? I am reconciled as to great, rough, coarse sins; I have my hymn-book and my psalm-book, and I gather with the people of God, and call myself reconciled to God through Christ: and that is right and most true as a matter of history and experience open to daily and indisputable confirmation; I know it. But am I reconciled to God when He sets up a sick-chamber in my house, and says to me, Keep the key of this door yourself, make this your school-house, offer your prayers within these shades and glooms, and offer them joyously, make your very suffering a sacrifice and offering of praise? We may not have reached that second reconciliation in its fullest and best sense, but we may be growing towards it; every time we turn the lock of that sick-chamber we may say, God pity me, God help me to pray more fully and richly to-day than I was able to pray yesterday, and so enlarge my horizon that I shall give things something like their intended proportion, and catch the meaning of the Divine going even in silence, when nothing can be heard but the dropping of tears.

We are reconciled to God in the rougher sins and the initial sins, but what about God's discipline with our souls? Are we reconciled to God in the matter of discipline? Is discipline a Bible word? Could you at this moment answer this question definitely? Sometimes people think discipline is a dictionary word, or a made word; but somehow this great vessel which we call the Bible has caught all the language and all the words in their best and deepest meanings; and the word discipline is in the Bible. You know that the promises are there, you have marked your Bible in

some bright colour that your eye may easily alight upon the promises; will you look into your Bible presently, and say if you have marked the word discipline with a black line? Are you not a little too fond of the promises, because you only understand them in their literal sense and in some sense of immediate comfort? Do you accept the promises as a species of discipline? That is what the apostle did; he said, "Having therefore, beloved, these promises, let us——" then he stood in military altitude and stature, and delivered as he never failed to deliver some exhortation towards cleanness and holiness. Some of us cannot read the promises except in the sense of their being so much spiritual confectionery. Believe me, they are not; such encouragement means increase of strength; consolation means enhancement of virtue or manliness; not a getting rid of the burden, but such an increase of the strength that bears it as to make nothing of it. What does a giant know whether he is carrying a pebble or two more or less? His strength is the central question with him.

Are we reconciled to God in the matter of discipline, which sometimes means rebuke; which sometimes means that God will not see us to-day in the way we like best; which means that sometimes the morning order is to go into wildernesses and far-off places where there is no bread and where the water is but liquid poison, and we may have to go there for a time to learn a particular but necessary lesson in the school of bitterness. We have had fathers in the flesh and teachers who have been strict disciplinarians, and we almost resented their military, their Spartan discipline at the time, but we have lived to thank God for such kindly-meant severity; it kept us at our work, it taught us our weakness, it showed us the possibility of our strength; it, along with other elements and ministries, in the providence of God, made us men. Are there any men made now?

Are we reconciled to God in the distribution and in the allotment of talent and position and prize of a social kind? If so, we have got rid of the devil jealousy, envy. Are we reconciled to God when we see that the man standing next us has got five

talents, and we have got but two? I do not ask whether the man who has the five talents is reconciled to God in the matter of distribution of possession and prize; my concern is about the man who has the lower number, who has only the two, or the one, or the one and a half—that most difficult of all possessions in which the one and a half is oftentimes so nearly two as to vex itself and find fault with God. This is a sore trial to the flesh, this is indeed severe discipline. Why is one man low down, and another man high up? Why is one man a musician, but not a vocalist? Why are we so near being at the top, and yet just one stride short of it? And is it enough to know that God has done all this? and do we say, He who set the stars in their places has set men also in their position? It is hard, sometimes it seems unjust. Then the enemy says, Of course it is unjust; you ought to feel and to express it and to act upon it; you never can turn things of this kind into prayer, quoth the devil; you ought to turn these things into criticism and into condemnations of what is roughly and often falsely called providence; why, continues the devil, there is no such providence, it is a rough-and-tumble life, first come, first served; it is the man who makes for the uppermost place that gets it. The Christian in his best moments knows better than that; there is an allotment, an allocation and distribution of power and talent and genius and position and all manner of good gifts, and we have not received the second reconciliation until we can say, It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth good in His sight. A philanthropist visiting one of our deaf-and-dumb institutions ventured upon a question on the black-board, for which he could have apologised, and yet he seemed to be unable to control himself when the suggestion came to his mind, and he wrote, “Why were you born deaf and dumb, and I was born to hear and speak?” These are the questions that test our Christianity in the aspect of the second reconciliation. And one of the inmates of the sacred home stepped forward, took the chalk, and wrote under the question this answer: “Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight”—an answer that made the deaf-and-dumb world hear and speak in the largest and best sense. If we could only get into the second

reconciliation, as we got into it what wondrous results would follow! What would such second reconciliation do for us? It would put us right in our relation to God, so that we should say, Thou art the giver, I am the receiver; Thou doest as Thou wilt among the armies of heaven: Thy will be done as in heaven so on earth. We never can get into that mood of submission, which is more than submission, until we get into the very heart of Christ and drink at the very fountains of His love. It is not submission in the sense of a grievous must or a fatalistic necessity; it is acquiescence, consent. Even so—a kissing of the hand that gives all the favours to the lowly universe.

When we enter into this blessing and security of the second reconciliation we shall have peace, we shall know that it is all right because God did it. That is the supreme miracle of the Holy Ghost. Observe, there are miracles wrought by Christ, and miracles wrought by the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ prepared us for those spiritual miracles by performing some of them Himself, and giving us a hint that this is the kind of miracle that He meant from the very first. They are no miracles that relate to the body, its bones, its diseases, its limitations, and its infirmities; these are but initial or elementary, alphabetic and outline miracles; the great miracles are spiritual and belong to another region of divine sovereignty, and if we receive the second reconciliation we shall have peace because God does it all. Did He send that fell disease into the family? Yes, He did. "Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?" There cannot. How timid souls have been frightened at that text and timid preachers who have avoided it! Can there be evil in the city and the Lord not have done it? Can there be a devil in the universe, and the Lord not have created him? No. All things are of God. The explanation must come by-and-bye. The last thousand years have given us many explanations, the next thousand will give us still more; and we must not allow that there is a power in the universe that can outwit God, that can intercept His designs and frustrate them. See what the enemy is doing to Job, the poor, crouching,

helldog that said, May I touch him? Yes, but let his life alone. He could not move without permission. There is a great mystery there which no words can ever explain, but I would rather take the mystery of the divine sovereignty in all its completeness than put God on half a throne and some demon prince on the other half. I believe God; I believe that the grave will be explained, I believe that death is a riddle which God set and God alone can answer. Lord, increase our faith!

When we enter into this second reconciliation we shall get the best out of life, and until we enter the second reconciliation we shall not get the best out of life; it will be a mere scramble for existence, it will be a misreading of the divine purpose, and it will be a great heat and unrest and irreligious tumult, until we get to the centre of things and know that God is bringing us into the second reconciliation, so that in presence of the wilderness and the serpent and the great sea and deep river we shall be able to say, I can do all things through Christ which enableth me. The impious man is never happy, the jealous man cannot have an hour's peace; he tries to turn his jealousy into laughter, but the merriment dies on his livid lips. He says, Jealous, forsooth! what is there to be jealous of? In that hour Satan has won his triumph. May we pray God to give us a right acceptance of His will, a profound interpretation of His providence, and a tender anthem-singing acquiescence in all His decrees and all His purposes; then shall we be reconciled unto God, then shall we be able to say, Not my will, but Thine be done. Do not trust in the wisdom of the wise men or in the understanding of man's prudence, for that understanding the Lord hath said, with a promise that is also a threatening, shall be hid, obscured. It is His delight to turn the interpreters who have not learned His spirit upside down and to make them the laughing-stock of the pious creation.

I do not ask, Have we received the first reconciliation? I end where I began. I will not say, Are you a converted sinner? You are. I do not believe in evangelistic services, so-called, that limit themselves to only one aspect of the divine reconciliation. The

one aspect is necessary to the completion of the other, and Christians need to be evangelised. I bethink me of what the Spirit gave me to say a moment ago, to my great surprise, of atheistic theism, of being an atheist in the sanctuary, of having a God, not on paper only, but in vocal psalm and triumphant hymn, but none in the soul of the soul. Men, that is what we want, a revival of spiritual, penetrating, profound faith in God, a faith which enables us to say, All things work together for good to them that love God; come what may, God will see that His purpose is vindicated at the last, and when the hurly-burly's done and the battle's lost and won, it shall be Christ that shall be seen on the throne; we shall see no man, save Jesus only.

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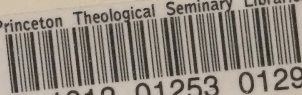
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